GOD

Thoughts and W

Above *Ours*, especially in

Forgiveness of

IN SEVERAL

SERMON

UPON

ISAIAH LV. 7, 8,

By *John Show*

LONDON:

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THE PREFACE

I Am Encouraged to think that the following Sermons did Good in Preaching; and with the Hope they may be of some further Use, they are now Published. It hath been desir'd that I would Transcribe them in the Words wherein they were deliver'd, which with very little Variation, I have consented to, as to the First Four. It may be, the peculiar Turn of Expression, tho' popular and less exact in the Pulpit, renders the plain Truths of Christianity acceptable to most Hearers, may be more Useful and more Affecting to some

Readers, than what is more Concise, and in more studied Words.

I can never reckon it a Fault, in a Sermon to a Numerous Auditory, that the Stile is different from what is expected, in a close and just Discourse: Or that what might be said in two Words or Sentences, is expresst in three or four. Perhaps the greatest Part of the Hearers, need such Enlargement and Repetition, and their Capacity could not otherwise be reached, so as to Profit them, any more then that Game may be taken by a Net Unspread.

Very Wise Men have Thought, that it is a Mistake in a Conscientious Preacher, to endeavour to please only a few of the more Knowing and Judicious Hearers. But that which is

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suited to do Good to the Generality of those we Preach to, will ordinarily be best Thought of by Wise Men, whose Capacity and Judgment could reach what was more Accurate: For they must needs know, that it would not be Proper here. They themselves have Sins to be forgiven, and Corruptions to be mortify'd, and Immortal Souls to be sav'd, and so have their Inferiours: And there is but one Way, for the Learned and Unlearned, to get to Heaven, that I know of.

'Tis True, the Things treated of will be despis'd by Many, who do not Relish what's contained in such Discourses. The Matter is out of their Way. They are not Sensible of Sin, nor Solicitous about Forgiveness: And so think not themselves concern-

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ed. And it is to be fear'd there a
Many Others, who hear and rea
Sermons, only to Judge of them, wit
any Desire of Advantage to the
Souls. They are not better'd for th
Sermons they Commend, any more tha
by those they Condemn. They may say
perhaps it was an Excellent Di
course, He's a Good Orator, a
a Judicious Preacher, and This Ser
mon exceeded, even his Last: Bu
their Consciences are not touch'd, the
feel nothing that doth them any real
Good.

However, there are Many I hope, i
this City and Nation, who will be
thankfull for any such Assistance, to
prevent their Despair, when convinced
of Sin; as the Doctrine of God's Free
Grace in Forgiveness, that is display'd

in

the First Four Sermons. And O-
ers, who meet with Objections, in Con-
ersation, and in Pamphlets, against the
hristian Doctrine, of the Sacred Tri-
, the Incarnation of Christ, and God's
ise Government of the World, from
he Unaccountable Passages of Provi-
ence, (which are apt to stumble them,
ay be willing to consider, and im-
rove this Argument of God's Thoughts
ot being as Ours, but far above our
Reach, which is the Subject of the
Fifth Sermon.

Let me only add, that many Youn-
er Ministers, as well as Elder, have
Dyed of Late: And tho' Few of us
will be miss'd, when we Dye, (there
being such Numbers to Supply our
Places,) yet Every One should endeavour,
to be as Useful, as he can while he lives

for the Night is haſtening, wherein no Work can be done. If Any Reader *get Good, let him give* God *the Glory; I moſt earneſtly beg* His *Bleſſing, to that End.*

J. S.

THE First Sermon.

ISAIAH, LV. 7, 8, 9.

Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the Unrighteous Man his Thoughts, and let him Return unto the Lord, and he will have Mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly Pardon.

For My Thoughts are not your Thoughts, neither are your Ways My Ways, saith the Lord.

For as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My Ways higher than your Ways, and My Thoughts than your Thoughts.

THere are Three Things Considerable in this Passage:

First, A Call to Repentance, by a Double Precept, or Injunction of Duty. The Persons concerned in it are set

forth under two Names, to take in all sorts of Sinners; *The Wicked*, and *the Unrighteous*: And the Duty is doubly expreſt; to *forſake their evil Wayes*, and *Thoughts*, and to *Return to the Lord*: Which are the Two Parts of true Repentance, *Turning from Sin*, and *Returning to God*.

Secondly, Here's an Encouraging Promiſe, that *God will have Mercy* on ſuch Penitents, and will *abundantly Pardon* 'em: That He will Intereſt them in *the ſure Mercies of David*, Ver. 3. or in all the Bleſſings of the Everlaſting Covenant by *Chriſt*: 'Tis of him you muſt underſtand, *Ver.* 4, 5, 6. of whom *David* was only a Type: *Behold I have given him for a Witneſs to the People, a Leader and Commander to the People*, &c.

Thirdly, The Ground and Reaſon, why we may believe this Promiſe ſhall be made good: *For my Thoughts are not as your Thoughts, ſaith the Lord God, but as high as the Heavens are above the Earth*, &c. *i. e.* There is a vaſt Diſparity between *my Thoughts* and yours; and mine are Tranſcendently above yours, as far as Heaven is above the Earth: And ſo are *My Ways* above your Ways. This is true as to God's *Thoughts* and Purpoſes of Grace in Pardoning Sinners; and as to the Effects of thoſe kind Purpoſes in his *Ways* and *Works*. And the Higheſt Aſſurance of the Truth of all this is added from a Divine Teſtimony annex'd, *Thus ſaith*

saith the Lord. He who best knows his own Gracious Designs, hath told us this; and by our believing it, we set to our Seals that God is true. Several things might be Observ'd, as proper to be Discours'd of, from these Words:

First, That if ever Sinners find Mercy with God, they must forsake their former Evil Ways and Course of Life.

Secondly, That 'tis not enough for such to to reform their outward Practice, and forsake their Evil Ways, but they must be chang'd and sanctify'd in Heart, their *Evil Thoughts* must be forsaken.

Thirdly, That 'tis not sufficient to turn from Sin and Wickedness in Heart and Life, without returning unto God.

Fourthly, That the worst of Sinners, be they wicked, as to Sins against God, or unrighteous, as to Iniquity against Men; yet if they turn from their Evil Wayes, and return to the Lord, they shall find Mercy. Tho' you have sinned (as you think) so as never any did before, and condemn your selves as the chiefest of Sinners; and have refus'd the pardoning Mercy of God formerly offer'd, *&c.* All this may be forgiven. And it is implied, that it shall be, upon every New Invitation and Call to Repentance, that *Where Sin hath abounded, Grace shall much more abound.*

Fifthly, He will have Mercy, and will abun-

dantly pardon; let him consider the *Certainty* of this, and thereupon *Return*. We may here Observe, That the great Motive and Encouragement which puts Sinners on forsaking their Evil Wayes, and turning to God, is a sensible Apprehension, that there is Mercy and Forgiveness to be had. There could be no Repentance without it, nor would it be required of us as a Duty, to repent and return, if there were no Forgiveness with God.

Sixthly, Besides the General Encouragement of finding Mercy with God, here is the special kind of Mercy, which the Sinner needs, and that is *Pardon*. I may here Observe, That pardoning Mercy to returning Sinners, is *Mercy indeed*; of all others, the most suitable, and most welcome.

Seventhly, That God will not only show Mercy to Returning Sinners, but he will abundantly pardon 'em, he will multiply Pardons.

I. *First*, That if ever Sinners find Mercy with God, they must forsake their Evil Ways. The ordinary Course of any Man's Life is very fitly called *his Way*, that which is his ordinary Practice, his daily Walk. Accordingly we read of the Way of a Sinner, and the Path of the Wicked, and the Way of Evil Men: This is often call'd *our own Way*, in Opposition to the Way of Truth and Righteousness, which is called the *Way of the Lord*,

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or God's Way: Becauſe he directs and approves it, and enables us to walk in it, and rewards us for ſo doing.

And this is the great difference between the Righteous and the Wicked: Their Courſe and Way is different. A good Man may make a falſe Step, he may ſtumble or ſtep out of the way, in a particular Inſtance, but he doth not work Iniquity, doth not walk in the way of the Ungodly, his Courſe and Converſation, for the main of it, is otherwiſe. And 'tis not for one or two particular Actions, good or bad, that a Man's to be denominated a good or wicked Man; but from his ordinary Courſe of Life: If that be wicked, he muſt forſake it, or never find Mercy with God. And this muſt be done heartily and unfeignedly, ſpeedily and without delay, impartially and univerſally, with full purpoſe of Heart to perſevere, and never again return to Folly. Without this, there can be no Converſe with God, nor Communion with him: *Waſh ye, make ye clean, put away the Evil of your Doings, then come and let us reaſon together*, Iſa. I. 16, 17. 'Till this be reſolv'd upon and begun, you are Impenitent, and ſo abominable in the ſight of God: For certainly God will not diſhonour his Perfections, contradict his Word, and proſtitute his Grace, to juſtifie the Ungodly, while they continue *ſuch*, without deſiring, reſolving and endeavouring to forſake their Evil Ways. Where-

ever Christ is a Saviour, to give Remission of Sin, he does also give them Repentance, *Acts* V. 31.

II. *Secondly*, That 'tis not enough for one, who expects to find Mercy with God, to reform his Practices, and forsake his Evil Wayes, but he must be inwardly sanctify'd, his Heat renewed, his very Thoughts changed; *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous Man his thoughts*, &c. *His Thoughts*, especially his False, Unjust, Unrighteous Thoughts of God, whereof Sinners have very many: Here the Change must be, because the Heart is the principal Seat of Sin or Grace, of Sincerity or Hypocrisie. It is in the inward Thoughts and Affections of the Heart, that Sanctification or Carnality doth principally discover it self: 'Till the Fountain be cleansed, the Streams will be polluted. The unsanctify'd Heart is the Source of Evil Thoughts, Words and Actions: *Wash thy Heart, O Jerusalem! how long shall vain Thoughts lodge in thee? As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he*, Prov. XXIII. 7. *The Thoughts of the wicked*, or wicked Thoughts, *they are Abomination in the sight of God*, Prov. XV. 26. And 'tis the Design of the Gospel, and the Glory of it, beyond all the Philosophy in the World, to bring our Thoughts into Obedience to Christ. While any Wickedness is indulged, and allowed in the Heart and Thoughts, no outward Reformation, as to

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our Behaviour before the World, no Abſtinence from groſs Pollutions and Diſorders in the Life, will denominate us truly Penitent, or give us Hopes of finding Mercy with God. While we regard Iniquity in our Hearts, while the Heart goes after Covetouſneſs, Filthineſs, or any allowed Luſt. Unleſs the Thoughts be chang'd, as well as the outward Courſe; unleſs the Heart be ſanctify'd, as well as the Converſation reform'd; there is no Forgiveneſs. You know the Woe which our Saviour denounc'd againſt the *Phariſees* on this Account, *Mat.* XXIII. 25. whom he characteriz'd as Hypocrites, becauſe they made clean the outſide of the Cup and Platter, but within were full of Extortion and Exceſs; that like whited Sepulchers, they appear'd Beautiful outward, but were within full of dead Mens Bones, and all Uncleanneſs.

III. *Thirdly*, Obſerve further, That 'tis not enough to turn from Sin and Wickedneſs in Heart and Life, but if you would find Mercy with God, you muſt return unto the Lord. To clear this, Conſider, That we are departed and gone off from God by Sin, both as he is our Chief Good and Sovereign Lord: We have abandon'd and forſaken him as our Portion and Felicity, and as he is our Lord and Ruler. 'Tis neceſſary therefore that we return to him, ſo as to value his Favour as our very Life, place all

our Happineſs in his Love and Likeneſs; obſerve his Orders, and endeavour to pleaſe him; that we deſign his Honour, and make it our Buſineſs to glorifie him; and be entirely devoted to him as our Ultimate End. Without reſolving on this, there's no ground to expect Mercy in the Pardon of the leaſt Sin; and upon this we may hope for Forgiveneſs of the greateſt.

Men may break off a Courſe of Notorious, Open Wickedneſs, upon various and different Motives, and then take up with a Negative Religion, without returning to God. They may ſatisfie themſelves, that now they don't commit the like Crimes as formerly; they may think it enough, that they are not as bad as others are, or as once they were themſelves: But this is not ſufficient, if they are deſtitute of Love to God, if they are not careful to pleaſe him, if his Glory be not their End, if they do not eye his Authority, if they are not chiefly concern'd to be accepted with him, if they do not chooſe him as the Portion of their Soul, and by an entire Reſignation of themſelves, make him Lord of all; to govern their Actions by the Counſels of his Word, and to diſpoſe and order their Conditions, by his moſt Wiſe and Holy Providence. Such a turning to the Lord muſt be joyn'd with forſaking of Sin.

IV. *Fourthly*, Let the Wicked and Unrighte-

righteous forſake the Evil of his Heart and Wayes, and turn to the Lord, and he ſhall find Mercy. I Obſerve, That the Vileſt and moſt Hainous Tranſgreſſors, (let their Sins be what they will,) if they penitently return to God, they may be aſſur'd of Pardon. Whatever Wickedneſs againſt God, or Unrighteouſneſs againſt Men, whatever Iniquity or Sin, in Heart or Life, Open or Secret, they are charged with, yet is there Mercy with God upon true Repentance. The Holy Scriptures are full of this Doctrine. How large and general are the Invitations and Calls of God to all ſorts of Sinners? How Expreſs and Poſitive are the Declarations of his Word? that even Scarlet and Crimſon Sins ſhall be as Snow and Wool; that All Sin and Blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven, except that againſt the Holy Ghoſt, which is joyn'd with Obſtinate Impenitence, that our Lord Jeſus Chriſt came to ſave the chiefeſt of Sinners, and that his Blood cleanſeth from all Sin. What a large and black Catalogue is there, of ſuch as ſhall not enter into the Kingdom of God, Fornicators, Adulterers, Idolaters, Sodomites, Drunkards, Revilers and Extortioners? and yet 'tis added, *Such were ſome of you, but ye are waſhed*, 1 Cor. VI. 9, 10, 11. *He is a God pardoning Iniquity, Tranſgreſſion and Sin*, Mic. VII. 18. How affectionately doth God expoſtulate with Sinners? even the Vileſt of them, and urge them to caſt

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away their Tranſgreſſions, and aſſure them that he hath no pleaſure in their Ruine? How earneſtly doth he beſeech them to be reconcil'd, and hearken to the Voice of his Mercy? With what Variety of Arguments doth he plead with them? from the Greatneſs of his Mercy offer'd, from the Freeneſs and Riches of his Grace, from the Abſolute Neceſſity of it, and from the Hazard they run of being undone for ever, if they refuſe it? What Inſtances are there of the blackeſt Crimes forgiven? and the moſt Hainous Offenders received to Favour? with an Aſſurance, that Others may be ſo too, if they will return? *Ceaſe to do Evil, Learn to do Well: Come now and let us reaſon together*, Iſa. I. 16. that is, there is nothing paſt ſhall be a Bar to your Reconciliation, if you will *Now* return; no Sin that you have ever committed ſhall be your undoing, if you will *Now* accept of Mercy. I may ſafely ſay this to every Man and Woman in this Aſſembly: And ſhould there be any that think, that they have ſinned with ſuch peculiar Aggravations, as never any did who were forgiven, (which I believe is not true): Yet ſuppoſe it true, the Free-grace and Mercy of God hath never yet been try'd to the utmoſt: It can out-do all it hath ever done. The Aggravations of thy Guilt, can never be ſuch as to condemn thee, but the Vertue of the Blood of Chriſt is greater to pardon thee, if

if thou return to God by Jesus Christ. As far as Heaven is above Earth, God's Thoughts are above ours in this Matter.

There is an Instance of this in the beginning of the Bible, how *different* God's Thoughts are from ours, and how much above them: *I will not Curse the ground any more for Man's sake, saith God*, Gen. VIII. *because the imagination of the Heart of Man is only evil, and continually evil.* One would rather think, that God for that reason should do nothing but Curse it; but it seems to intimate, as if the kind Thoughts of God were to this purpose; "If I should never "leave Cursing, 'till Man leaves Sinning, "I should do nothing but Curse; but I will "not, &c.

I cann't hope to find Mercy, my Sin is so great, saith a Convinced Sinner; not considering, that 'tis the Glory of God to forgive a multitude of Sins; and that where Sin hath abounded, there is an Opportunity for Grace much more to abound. The Psalmist useth it as an Argument in Prayer, *Lord, forgive mine Iniquity, for it is great*, Psal. XXV. 11. An Argument fit to be us'd no where else. The greatness of his Sin made him fly to God for Pardon, but did not keep him from Returning. This is the Scope and Tenour of the whole Gospel: To this do all the Prophets and Apostles witness, *That through the Name of Christ whoever believes on him,*

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(without distinction) *shall receive the Forgiveness of Sin.* If you are weary and heavy laden, sensible of Sin, and desirous to forsake it; if you see your need of Christ, and flee to the Refuge of Hope set before you, you may, you ought to believe, that you shall find Mercy, Rest and Forgiveness.

And for the Encouragement of the worst of Sinners to Repent, it is Observed in all Ages, that many wicked People, who find Mercy with God, and are forgiven, have been much more Vile, than several of those that are left to perish in their Sins, and shall never be forgiven. How many that have been kept from gross Polutions, and made a longer and fairer Profession of Religion than others; who have abounded in outward Duties, who have been of more useful Parts, Endowments and Qualifications, more considerable for their Wit, Learning, and other Accomplishments, (more capable one would think, of doing Service in the World, and the Church, and for the Glory of God, if Converted) how many such are yet left to perish in their Impenitence and Unbelief? while Others have been call'd, and turn'd, justify'd, sanctify'd and sav'd; who have labour'd under many contrary Discouragements, and Disadvantages, as to all these, *&c.* especially by the Hainousness of their former Guilt and Rebellion.

Therfore consider it seriously, if thou hast

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been a great Sinner, God is a gracious God, and Christ is a mighty Saviour, able to save to the uttermoſt, all that come to God by him. He can as eaſily forgive five Hundred Talents as fifty Pence, though the Debtors are very different in the Parable; *Luke* VII. 41. *He frankly forgave them both.* Not only ſuch who have ſinned in ſome leſſer Degrees, may hope to find Mercy; but they who have run out into the groſſeſt Wickedneſs, Impiety, Unrighteouſneſs and Iniquity; not only ſuch who have neglected one, or two, or ten Calls to Repentance by the Goſpel, but if they have done ſo, for many Years to this Hour, they may yet find Mercy *Now*, if forſaking their Evil Ways, they return to God by Jeſus Chriſt.

Let your Sins paſt be what they will, ſay as bad as you will or can of your ſelves, and of the dreadful Aggravations of your Guilt, Cloath it with all the Horrour and Darkneſs poſſible; Yet, *As high as the Heavens are above the Earth*, ſo is the Mercy of God, and the Merit and Vertue of the Blood of Chriſt above your Guilt.

Object. "But I have ſtood out ſo long, "will ſome ſay, perſiſted in my Wickedneſs ſo many years, ſtifled the Motions of "God's Spirit ſo often, and been deaf to "the Voice of God's Word, and my own "Conſcience, that I fear he will never accept of *me*, nor ever ſhew Mercy to *me*,

"for

for he call'd and I would not come, he knock'd, and I would not open, and therefore if I call, I may expect to find the Door shut.

But in Answer to this, Consider, That as long as His Word abides faithful, and the Covenant of Grace is everlasting and unrepeal'd, and the Offers of God's Grace are repeated; as long as there's a New Proclamation of Mercy made in the Name of Christ, tho all the former have been despised, you may *Now* come in, and find Mercy, and be accepted *Now*. For every New Offer of God's Grace doth carry in it the Offer, and Promise of the Pardon of all your former Refusals, if you will *Now* consent. The Promise is as free, and the performance of it as sure, now as ever. You may come in *Now*, and be pardon'd and sav'd, upon as free and gracious Terms as several years agoe. 'Tis still without Money and without Price. Your Unbelief and Obstinacy so long, does not raise the Price, nor alter the Terms. Therefore plead the Riches of his Free-grace, and do it the more thankfully and humbly, the Vile you have been; saying, "Lord, thy Mercy "will be the more honour'd, thy Free-grace "will be the more magnify'd, and exalted in "the Conversion and Forgiveness of such a "Wretch, in the purging such a defiled "Soul, in the healing such a Leper, in the "pardoning so many and great Transgres-"sions.

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And 'tis often Obſerv'd, that [illegible] when they return to God, have the Advantage of others upon ſeveral Accounts, wherein God is more glorify'd by them: As that uſually they admire the Grace of God more than others, love God and Chriſt more, walk more humbly with God, are more charitable, Tender and Compaſſionate to other Chriſtians, and are uſually more watchful and circumſpect for the Time to come, and more afraid of falling: And commonly they are more abundant in Service, for the Honour of God; more entirely devoted to him, more zealous for his Glory, more of a Publick Spirit, more ready to do and to ſuffer any thing for his ſake. As this tends to the Honour of God, ſo it may be pleaded in Prayer.

Object. But before I cloſe this, I muſt obviate or anſwer an Objection or two more: I may ſuppoſe ſome will ſay, "That after "all, there's no finding Mercy and Forgive-"neſs with God, without *Faith in Jeſus* "*Chriſt*; and I can't for my Heart believe "in Chriſt, that he will receive me; I can-"not perſwade my ſelf, that ſuch a one as "I ſhould be accepted: What, ſhall the Inva-"luable Purchaſe of the Death of Chriſt be-"long to me? be beſtowed on me? if you'd "give me all the World, I can't believe "that ſuch a Wretch as I have been ſhall "find Mercy: You don't know, how I have

"affronted

dishonour'd, despis'd and disobey'd him. I have abus'd his Grace at that dreadful Rate, that you cann't imagine the Aggravation of my Sins, or the Sadness of my Case. I can't believe that he will ever forgive me, receive me, justifie me, and glorifie me: I can't believe it, and if I can't believe in Christ, I can't be saved by him.

Answ. I Answer, Don't mistake the Nature of saving Faith. You say, you can't believe, and you have no Faith. Whereas at the bottom, you mean no more than this, that as yet, you are not certain of Salvation, you have no Assurance. But are you willing to receive Christ Jesus, as offer'd in the Gospel? Hath the Spirit of God so far convinc'd you of your sinful, miserable State, that you heartily consent to be saved by Christ, in his own Way, and upon his own Terms? Are you willing to take him as your Teacher, Saviour and Lord? Are you brought to depend, and trust entirely upon the Mercy of God in Jesus Christ, as the only Mediator between God and Man? To relye upon his Sacrifice, and meritorious Righteousness, as your only Refuge and Hope? Desiring to be found in him alone, to be accepted of God only in the Beloved? and are truly willing, and as far as you know your own Hearts, are resolv'd to follow him as the Captain of your Salvation, where ever he shall lead you; in hope of his purchased, and promised

miſed Grace and Glory? This is Faith, and dare you ſay, that there's nothing of this that appears in the Temper of your Spirits?

Secondly, If you can't with any Confidence ſay this, yet the Caſe is hopeful, if you are in the number of convinced, awakened, ſenſible Sinners. Are you ſenſible of your Ignorance, Poverty, Guilt, Impurity, Bondage, Unrighteouſneſs, *&c.* and that you need Chriſt as a compleat Saviour, to be made of God unto us, Wiſdom, Righteouſneſs, Sanctification and Redemption? to expiate Sin by his Blood, and to ſubdue it by his Spirit, to reconcile us to God, and begin that bleſſed Union and Communion here, which ſhall be compleat in Heaven? And this comprehends our whole Salvation. Chriſt is the Saviour of Sinners, and of ſuch who are loſt, who apprehend themſelves to be ſo without his help, that feel their Sins and their Wants; he came not to call the Righteous, but Sinners to Repentance. And is a Phyſitian, not to the Whole, but to the Sick: He calls and cures, not the Proud, but the Humble; not the Full, but the Hungry; not the Rich, but the Poor; not the Free, but the Captive; who are ſenſible of their Bonds; not the Righteous, but Sinners. And he makes you, by his Spirit, thus humble, empty, hungry, and ſenſible of Sin; that you may look to him as the great Reconciler, ſenſible

of the need of Pardon. If it be thus, you may then look for Redemption through the Blood of Jesus, even the Forgiveness of Sins: Feeling your need of Sanctification, you may look to be wash'd and cleans'd, and sanctify'd in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by his Spirit; feeling your want of Strength to do and suffer the Will of God, you may look to Christ, to enable you to do all things. Now one that is not fully satisfy'd and assur'd, that Christ will save him, may yet be brought to this frame. How is it with you as to this?

Thirdly, Let me ask you further, under the Sense of being Vile and Hainous Sinners, are you brought earnestly to desire the Mercy of God in Christ, and diligently to seek after him? Tho' you sometimes fear he will not accept you, yet do you not neglect to pray to him? What would you not give, that you might be interested in God's pardoning Mercy, and accepted in Christ? Are not your greatest Fears, and Concern with respect to this, lest he should reject you? Are not the strongest Desires of your Souls after this, that he would receive you? And is it thus, not only at a Pinch, in Affliction and Trouble as to Outward Affairs, or on a sick Bed, but in Health and Prosperity? Is this the Language of your Souls? "I have Health, and Friends, and Money, "and Credit, and many Outward Blessings

"be-

"beyond others; I want nothing for my Bo-
"dy, or for my Comfortable Paſſage through
"this World: But I am yet a miſerable
"Creature, if I am under the Guilt of Sin;
"if God be not reconcil'd to me. O that
"I were clear as to this! what would I give
"to be at peace with God, and to have an
"Encouraging Senſe of it, &c.

Fourthly, Are you ſenſible of your paſt Unkindneſs to this Merciful God, and Gracious Saviour, ſo as to bewail it? Is it now the ground of your Fear and Trouble? not only that you have ſinn'd againſt the Light of Nature, (tho' it may be, you were firſt awaken'd by the ſenſe of ſome ſuch Tranſgreſſion) but now you are troubl'd for the Contempt of the Goſpel, for your Neglect of Chriſt, the Saviour of Sinners, for refuſing him, when he hath call'd and invited you? And are ready to ſay within your ſelves, "O with what "Earneſtneſs did he call me to accept his "Mercy! How freely did he offer to forgive "me! He would have been my Saviour, but "I would not receive him; with what Folly "and Obſtinacy did I harden my Heart, and "ſtop my Ears, and turn my Back upon "him? and reſiſted him both in his Word "and Spirit? Doth this greive and trouble you, as well as the groſs Pollutions of the World, which Natural Light will condemn?

Fifthly, Your Caſe is hopeful, notwithſtanding the ſenſe of your Vileneſs and Fears

on that Account; if you yet resolve to follow on, in seeking Mercy and Forgiveness of God by Jesus Christ, 'till you obtain it. Do you resolve you will wait, and pray, and wrestle, and persevere therein; 'till it shall please God to cast an Eye of Pity and Compassion on your miserable Souls? That you will continue in the use of God's appointed Means, where he communicates his Spirit, and conveys Grace, and where he is wont to vouchsafe his Presence? That you will enquire of every Body that may assist you, how you may be one of those Happy Souls, whom God will abundantly pardon? Can you say this, "That tho' I fear and "doubt, yet I seek, and strive, and will not "give over: I will not desist, I will not de-"part from his Door: I am undone if he re-"fuse me; and if I perish and dye in my "Sins, and be damned for them; it shall be "in seeking Mercy, and begging Mercy for "Christ's sake. And if you can say this truly, you may be assur'd you shall not perish, but find Mercy. Can you say, and is it the real Language of your Heart? Nothing in all the Word shall content and satisfie you, or is ever like to do so, 'till you have some good hope through Grace, of finding Mercy with God. You search the Scriptures, and search your Hearts, and go to Ministers, consult Friends, and attend Ordinances, with this Desire and Design; and you pray before you come

come to hear, that some seasonable, powerful Word may drop, and reach your Case. "Alas, I use to hear formerly after another "manner, and with other Thoughts; judging the Minister, passing Sentence on the "Sermon, or considering only, how it concern'd others of my Acquaintance: But "now I apply all to my self, now I look for "my own Portion, and watch for that which "principally concerns me. And by the Grace "of God I will thus attend and wait, and "watch at the Posts of Wisdoms Door, that "I may find Life, *Prov.* VIII. 34. Though I "I have but a very little Hope, and a great "many Fears, considering what a Vile Sinner I have been, yet I do not utterly despair: I am told, I must not despair, and "that Despair is a Sin, and Hope, a Duty. "And therfore I will yet hold on, and wait "upon the Lord, and seek his Mercy: Tho' "I can't pray with Confidence, I will yet "look up: tho' I can't say I believe, yet I'le not "utterly despair: tho' I have sinned against "the Grace of the Gospel, and the Blood "and Spirit of Christ, yet I hope, not above "and beyond the Help and Benefit of his "Grace, and Gospel, and Blood, and Spirit. "I'le therfore hold on, and wait in Hope, "in the diligent use of all the Means of Salvation.

V. *Fifthly*, I proceed to another thing observable from these Words; *Let him return*,

and he will have Mercy; and abundantly pardon. Let him think of that, and return, believe that, be encouraged to return. I Obſerve, *That the great Motive and Encouragement to put a Sinner on forſaking his Evil Ways, and returning to God, is the ſenſible Apprehenſion, that there's Mercy to be had; viz.* that God will forgive, and abundantly pardon the Penitent, Returning Sinner. I confeſs, 'tis not an eaſie matter, to be perſwaded of the Doctrine, of the Forgiveneſs of Sin: Whatever Gueſs and Conjecture Men may have about it, from the Divine Patience and Forbearance to a ſinful World, in the Continuance of his Forfeited Mercy: Yet * without the Goſpel Revelation, we are at no Certainty about this. The *Gentiles* had ſome Imaginations and Hopes, that their Gods were placable, and inclin'd to pardon, and that was the Riſe of their Expiations and Sacrifices; but they had no aſſured Promiſe or Covenant to build upon. They knew not the Mediator between God and Man, by his own Sacrifice of himſelf to make Attonement. 'Tis the Language of the Law written on our Hearts, that *The Soul that ſinneth ſhall dye:* 'Tis the Voice of Natural Conſcience, that Guilt and Puniſhment are inſeperable. And were there not ſomewhat known of the Doctrine of Forgiveneſs,

* See Mr. *Nathanael Taylor's* Preſervative againſt *Deiſm.* Octavo. Lately printed.

giveneſs, by the Revelation of it which God hath made, this would be the common Sentiment of Mankind. I need not conſider what particular Ways and Methods God may have, to reveal this Pardoning Mercy unto any, who are Strangers to the Written Word; or whether he hath done ſo: It belongs not to us to be Curious in enquiring about other Men, who ſhall be judged by a Righteous God, according to the Law they were under, and the Light they had. 'Tis certain, that even among thoſe to whom the Goſpel is preached, whoever they are, that are deeply convinc'd of Sin, and Conſcience awakened to apprehend the Holineſs and Juſtice of God, 'tis one of the moſt difficult things in the World, to perſwade them, that God will have Mercy, and abundantly pardon. It is one great Work of the Holy Spirit, to ſatisfie the Soul of this. There's no ſerious Miniſter of Chriſt, but hath abundant Experience of this, in thoſe that are awakened to any Concern for their Souls Salvation. There's Evidence ſufficient of this in *David*'s Frame, *Pſal.* CXXX. 3, 4. *If thou, Lord, ſhould'ſt mark Iniquities, O Lord, who ſhould ſtand? but there is forgiveneſs with thee*, &c. If God ſhould mark Sin, ſo as to proceed to puniſh it according to his Righteous Law, who could ſtand? who would eſcape Condemnation? or when accuſed, ſtand in the Judgment, ſo as to be acquitted?

"'Tis not my own Caſe alone, that if God "ſhould be ſtrict and ſevere with me, I am "an undone and loſt Creature: But 'tis true "of all the World. The Holieſt Saint on "Earth can't be juſtify'd in his Sight, and "what then would become of me, who have "ſuch a Load of Guilt, and ſo many hainous "Crimes to acknowledge? In this ſenſe we find the Expreſſion of *ſtanding* us'd, *Rom.* XIV. 4. *To his own Maſter he ſtandeth or falleth*; that is, ſhall either be acquitted or condemned of God. 'Tis of the ſame Import with *Pſal.* CXLIII. 2. *Enter not into Judgment with thy Servant, O Lord, for in thy ſight no fleſh living ſhall be juſtified.*

Conſider a little, with what a Frame of Spirit, doth *David* uſe ſuch Language; he ſeems to cry out in the View of his Hainous Sins, as ready to Deſpair, if not reliev'd by the Hope, that there is Forgiveneſs with God. *Lord, who can ſtand?* that is, how juſtly may I be Condemn'd, if I am try'd at thy Bar? According to ſtrict Juſtice, I muſt be caſt; I cannot anſwer thee for *one*, much leſs for *all* my Abominations: *I cannot ſtand in the Judgment.* This will be, and is, the Caſe of all Convinced Sinners; of every one of us, when we View our Sins; and the Majeſty of Heaven, whom we have offended: When we conſider, how we have affronted God, and deſpiſed him, and how eaſily he can cruſh us into Hell; and how

juſtly

justly he might. When we think, how we have preferr'd a Luſt, a Triſle, a Paſſion, an Humour, before him: How we have ſlighted his Authority, abus'd his Goodneſs, defi'd his Power, weari'd his Patience, rejected his Grace; and by numberleſs, aggravated Tranſgreſſions, incurr'd the Vengeance he hath threaten'd, and made our ſelves lyable to his intolerable and everlaſting Wrath. Under ſuch a Sight and Senſe of Sin, what can relieve? but the Conſideration, that there's Mercy and Forgiveneſs with God, and that He'll abundantly Pardon returning Sinners.

This, I ſay, we are backward to believe. There's ſo much Ignorance and Blindneſs in the Minds of Sinners; there's ſuch a proneneſs in Men to judge of God by themſelves; and of his Thoughts and Ways by their own; that becauſe *they* could not Pardon ſuch and ſuch hainous Provocations, ſo often repeated; they imagine that God will not. And there are ſo many Fears and Jealouſies in our guilty Souls, concerning God; that without the Encouragement of ſuch a Declaration of Grace, as in this Text, there could be *no Repentance*; there would be no Returning to God. You know what *Benhadad*'s Servants told him, 1 *Kings* XX. 31. *We have heard, that the Kings of Iſrael are Merciful Kings, let us put Sack-cloath*

as our Loyns, and Ropes about our Necks, and go to the King of Israel, peradventure he will save thy Life: This gracious Method God us'd toward *Israel*, *Jer.* III. 12. *Go, and proclaim these words toward the North, saying, Return, O back-sliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you; for I am Merciful, saith the Lord, and will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine Iniquity, that thou hast Transgressed against the Lord thy God:* that is, "Let them not "cherish any such hard Thoughts of me, "as if there were no Forgiveness; let them "not despair of my Mercy, as if I would "not receive them, when they return.

This gives the greatest Encouragement to Convinced Sinners, that here is a Plank to save them from Shipwrack, a Remedy against Despair: Here's a ground for 'em to return to God with Hopes: Here's a Motive to seek Mercy, that God hath proclaim'd his Readiness to forgive, and abundantly to pardon. And methinks 'tis very plain, that the Doctrine of *Repentance* would never have been preached, if there were no Hope of *Forgiveness*: The fallen Angels having no Mercy offer'd, were never call'd to repent; for let there be never so deep Conviction of Sin, and Sorrow for it, there could be no Repenting and Returning to God, without believing that Mercy might be had: All

would

would end in Death and Desparation. *Repentance* would never be commanded as a *Duty*, nor urged upon Sinners as a Duty: (it could not, if we believe the Wisdom, Goodness and Faithfulness of God) were it not for this Truth, that *If the wicked forsake his way*, &c. But upon the Consideration of this, Sinners begin to have good Thoughts of God, many of their Scruples are remov'd, many of their Objections answer'd, and they are now encourag'd to seek the Mercy of God, and prepare to receive it.

USE. To Conclude therfore, Let the vilest and worst of Sinners receive these glad Tydings of God's Grace, and not abuse them. Don't despise this Message, don't neglect it; but consider how much you need this Mercy; and go home, and earnestly beg it. Endeavour to welcome it, as it is offer'd in the Gospel; and then plead it, and urge it for Christ's sake, according to the Promise, as it is *Free-Mercy*: And stir up your Souls to hope in it; as knowing that *God takes pleasure in them that hope in his Mercy.*

May I not therfore say, that 'tis from the *Devil*, (for whom there is no Mercy) if there be any of you, to whom this Doctrine is preached, who will yet Conclude, *There's no Mercy for you?* Since God hath told us,

us, that *If the Wicked forsake his Evil Ways and Thoughts, and turn to the Lord*, they may and ought in that Case, most firmly believe, that *He will have Mercy*, and that *He will abundantly pardon.*

THE

THE Second Sermon.

ISAIAH, LV. 7.

Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the Unrighteous Man his Thoughts, and let him Return unto the Lord, and he will have Mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly Pardon.

THIS of the *Sixth Observation* from these Words that I would now speak, (without so much as repeating the other five,) *viz.* That *Pardoning Mercy to Penitent Sinners, is Mercy indeed*; the most valuable and seasonable Mercy. This I shall endeavour to manifest by several Considerations, and then Apply it.

First, There's nothing more suitable to the Case of a Guilty Sinner, who hath any Thoughts of returning to God. Consider the

the Perplexities of one that is awakened to a Senſe of Sin, and is under a Spirit of Conviction: His bitter Complaints, and loud Cryes tell us, that he knows not what to do, nor how to be rid of his Burden: He apprehends his Danger from unpardoned Sin, and feels the want of this Forgiveneſs: He is wounded, and nothing but the Voice of Pardoning Mercy can heal him. *I have greatly ſinn'd*, ſaid *David*, and his Heart ſmote him, *2 Sam.* XXIV. 10. *And now, I beſeech thee, O Lord, take away the Iniquity of thy Servant*: Nothing elſe could give him Eaſe and Quiet from an Accuſing troubled Conſcience. *The Inhabitant ſhall not ſay, I am ſick, the People that dwell therein ſhall be forgiven their Iniquity*, Iſa. XXXIII. 24. The meer Patience and Forbearance of God, without Forgiveneſs, will not anſwer the Exigence of his Caſe. Tho' he be yet out of Hell, he knows not how long it ſhall be ſo; or how ſoon he may there have a Miſerable Portion. 'Tis the Senſe of Unpardoned Sin that breaks his Bones, and dryeth up his Marrow; and ſticks like an Arrow in his fleſh. Whereas Pardoning Mercy is as Health to the Navel, and Marrow to the Bones, and a Cordial to his Heart; yea, even as *Life from the Dead*. And dead he is in Law, as under a Sentence of Condemnation, 'till he be intereſted in Forgiveneſs, by Faith in the Blood of Jeſus. Then may he

he lift up his Head, as one Alive from the Dead; and admit Conſolation; when he can hope his Sins are forgiven; and that God is reconciled. *Comfort ye, Comfort ye my People, ſay unto Jeruſalem, her Warfare is Accompliſhed, her Iniquity is forgiven*, Iſa. XL. 1, 2. *Bleſſed is the Man whoſe Iniquity is forgiven, and Sin covered*, Pſal. XXXII. 1. 'Till then, they are under the Curſe of God on Record: A Curſe, that cuts off from God, and all gracious Communications from him; a Curſe which pierceth deep, and ſpreadeth far, and makes the whole Creation at Enmity with us: And this Curſe is intolerable in the Effects of it, and unavoidable too. There is no Relief or Remedy againſt it, but by the New Covenant, and Faith in Jeſus Chriſt. 'Tis only by the Redemption we have in Jeſus Chriſt, through his Blood, even the Forgiveneſs of Sins: In which Forgiveneſs we can never be intereſted, without Repentance towards God, and Faith in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. *There is no Reſt in my Bones, becauſe of my Sin*, ſaith the Pſalmiſt; Pſal. XXXVIII. 3. *My Sins are an heavy Burden, they are too heavy for me*, v. 4. 'Till this Burden be removed by Forgiveneſs, what Eaſe or Reſt can a Sinner enjoy?

'Tis true, the Deceit of ſenſual Pleaſures, or the Hurry and Clatter of Worldly Buſineſs, may hinder the Senſe of this for a while; and keep all quiet: Yet ſooner or later,

later, the ſinful Soul will have Torment: Conſcience will awake. Men may laugh and be merry for a Time, make a ſhift to be confident and ſecure, under the Wrath and Curſe of God; they may take their Poyſon for their Antidote, their Wound for their Plaiſter, their Plague for their Cure, their Diſeaſe for their Remedy; and ſo make a hard ſhift to preſerve a little falſe Peace: But the End will be the moſt horrid Deſpair. And the more Jovial and Airy, Careleſs and Preſumptuous, they have been in Health and Proſperity, under the Guilt of great Tranſgreſſions; the more diſconſolate will ſuch be, when Conſcience awakes, to ſet their Sins in order before them. Is there then any Meſſage like that of Forgiveneſs, that will ſuit the Caſe of ſuch? They can reliſh nothing elſe, think of nothing elſe, this is what they aim at. This is the Subject of their great Enquiry, *How they may be forgiven.* They may try in vain, what Company, Mirth, Sports, Buſineſs, or Superſtition will do: They muſt come to God for Pardon, or they cannot find Reſt. *Hoſ.* V. 13. *When Ephraim ſaw his ſickneſs, and Judah ſaw his wound; then went Ephraim to the Aſſyrian, and ſent to King Jareb; yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound.*

Did you know the Miſery and Danger of a ſinful Soul, unreconciled to God, bound over to his Eternal Wrath, every Moment

expos'd

expos'd as a Guilty Wretch, to his fiery Vengeance? Did you conſider the Caſe of ſuch a One? who hath all the Plagues and Curſes in the Book of God, in force againſt him; and nothing but a little Breath between him and Endleſs Ruine; that can't tell but the next Day or Minute, Death may open the Door, and let him fall into Damnation? Did any one rightly underſtand this, believe it, conſider it, and apply it as his own Caſe? what Mercy will ſuit ſuch a One, but *Pardoning Mercy?* What is all the Pomp and Glory of this World to ſuch a Man, without the Forgiveneſs of Sin? How can he eat, drink or ſleep, or trade, or do any thing, without ſome Hope of Pardon? without ſeeking after it? without endeavouring it? without uſing means in Order to it?

Secondly, Pardoning Mercy is Mercy *indeed*, as 'tis the Fruit of Covenant Love, an Effect of the ſpecial, diſtinguiſhing Love of God: This is the great Priviledge of ſuch whoſe God is the Lord. This is a Covenant Bleſſing, that's never given in Anger: This is never beſtow'd, but as a Favour, peculiar to God's People. This is always accompany'd with Regeneration, and Adoption, *Jer.* XXXI. 33. *I will be their God, and will forgive their Iniquity. Happy is the Man whoſe Iniquity is forgiven, Happy is the People whoſe God is the Lord.*

Thirdly, This Mercy is the moſt Compre-

henſive Bleſſing, and the Foundation of many other Mercies. This ſecures our State, ſweetens our other Bleſſings, lays the Foundation for Peace of Conſcience, gives Freedom of Acceſs to the Throne of Grace, and makes way for Communion with God in all Ordinances: This clears us from the Accuſation of Satan, the Condemnation of the Law, and of our own Hearts; for who ſhall lay any thing to his Charge, whom God forgives? We can have no Right and Title to Eternal Life without this: For the Legal Bar muſt be removed by the Pardon of Sin, as well as the Moral Incapacity by the Sanctifying Spirit. The great Bleſſings of the Goſpel, ſuch as the Spirit of Holineſs, Communion with God, *&c.* they are promiſed to Accompany this of Forgiveneſs, *Heb.* VIII. latter End. *I will be merciful to their Unrighteouſneſs, and their Iniquities I will remember no more.* By this we not only eſcape the Puniſhment due to Sin, which would render us deeply miſerable, but are reſtored to the Favour of God, and accepted in the Beloved, and have Grace to overcome the World, Fleſh, and Devil. The ſanctifying Spirit to purge us from all Filthineſs, is joyn'd with this Pardon, which delivers from the Condemning Guilt of Sin. We are tranſlated into the Kingdom and Family of Chriſt, as well as deliver'd from the Kingdom of Satan, and the Power of Darkneſs. In a Word, the

Accep-

Acceptation of our Perſons, Sanctification of our Natures, the Anſwer of our Prayers, and a Title to Heaven and Eternal Life, are connected with, and conſequent to this Forgiveneſs of Sin, *Pſal.* XXXII. 1, 2, 3. *Zec.* I. 4. *Iſa.* LIX. 2, 3. *Pſal.* CIII. 2, 3. *Job* VII. 21.

This alſo hath reſpect to all the Comforts and Afflictions of this preſent Life. You ought to Conſider, that if Sin be forgiven, all things ſhall work for good. *Take away all Iniquity*, (ſaith the Church) *and receive us graciouſly, or do us good*, Hoſ. XIV. 2. Every Providence ſhall be ſanctified, if Sin be forgiven. *For peace I had great bitterneſs*, ſaith *Hezekiah*, *but in love to my Soul, thou haſt deliver'd it from the Pit of Corruption; for thou haſt caſt all my ſins behind thy Back*, Iſa. XXXVIII. 17. You have a like Inſtance, *Jer.* XXXIII. 6, 8. But if you had all the Plenty, Peace, Health, Riches and Grandeur of this World, yet the Guilt of one Sin on the Conſcience, under the Apprehenſion of God's deſerved Wrath, will ſpoil the Reliſh of all. Where Sin is forgiven, other Mercies will be ſweet, and the Burden of Affliction tolerable: But without this, and under the Apprehenſions of the contrary, every Temporal Calamity is double. For this is the Wormwood and the Gall in every bitter Cup. We ſhall not under the Troubles and Diſappointments of this World, cry out we are *undone*, if we can think that

God hath forgiven us: No more than a Man, who has juſt receiv'd his Prince's Pardon, (when he lay under a Sentence of Condemnation to Death) can be thought, if he loſe his Glove or Handkerchief in the way home, that he will wring his Hands, and weep, and take on for ſuch a Loſs, when he had ſo lately his Life graciouſly given him.

Beſides, Hereby is a Foundation laid for a Life of Thankful Love and Obedience to God. Conſcience being purg'd from dead Works, we ſerve the Living God without fear, in hope of his Acceptance; with the Promiſe of his hearing our Prayers, and that he will be well pleaſed with our Services, and overlook our Infirmities, *&c.* We may therefore well bear the Tryals of this Life with Patience and Reſignation; and in a dying Hour, ſhall be able to commend our Souls with Faith and Hope, into the Hands of Chriſt, who will take Care of us as his own, when we leave the World; and at laſt publickly acknowledge and abſolve us in the great Day. Oh how many Mercies accompany this one, of the Forgiveneſs of Sin!

Fourthly, This is Mercy *indeed* to a Returning Sinner; Peculiar Mercy, as it it *Irrevocable*. Where Sin is forgiven, and Iniquity blotted out, it ſhall be remember'd *no more*. You are freely juſtify'd from all things, and ſhall never come into Condemnation. *This my Covenant of Peace ſhall never be removed,* ſaith

ſaith the Lord, who hath mercy on thee, Iſa. LIV. 10. This is not only true of the firſt Settlement of it, but is the Priviledge of every one, who is under the Bond and Bleſſing of the New Covenant. *Tho' I viſit his Tranſgreſſion with a Rod, and his Iniquity with Stripes, nevertheleſs my loving Kindneſs will I not utterly take from him, nor ſuffer my Faithfulneſs to fail; my Covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my Lips.* God may remember the Sins of Pardoned Believers, ſo as to afflict them in this World, and exerciſe the Diſcipline of his Family: Their ſhare in National Sins, may involve them in preſent Sufferings with others: And for particular Tranſgreſſions, God may teſtifie his Fatherly Diſpleaſure againſt good Men, by remarkable Afflictions; but will not reverſe their Pardon, ſo as to puniſh them Eternally. *Ely, David, Jonah,* and others are Inſtances. Your Peace with Heaven ſhall never be ſo broken; none of your Afflictions will prove it. The Reconciliation between God and Sinners, that is once accepted by a Real, Active, Unfeigned, Obedient Faith, is Perpetual. It is promis'd, that our Iniquities ſhall be *blotted out*, and *remember'd no more*; that God will *caſt 'em behind his Back*; *Caſt 'em into the bottom of the Sea*; *Scatter 'em as a thick Cloud*, &c. *Iſa.* XLIII. 25. *Pſal.* LI. 9. *Iſa.* XXXVIII. 17. *Mic.* VII. 19. *Iſa.* XLIV. 22. And yet more expreſly to aſſure us, that God will not enter

into Judgment with us, for the Sins he hath once forgiven, we read, *Jer.* L. 20. *In that day ſhall the Iniquity of Iſrael be ſought for, and there ſhall be none; and the Sins of Judah, and they ſhall not be found.*

Where God beſtows Forgiveneſs, he communicates the Spirit of Grace, for the Mortification of Sin. And tho' that Work be not perfect, it ſhall be progreſſive; and the Remainders of Corruption in the Soul, will not prove that your Sin is not forgiven. The Fleſh will war againſt the Spirit, and the Spirit will ſtrive againſt the Fleſh; but you can't conclude, that you are not forgiven, from the Oppoſition that Sin makes againſt the Grace of God in the Soul. Would you judge of your ſelves? conſider what Oppoſition you make againſt Sin: Would you have Relief? Apply to the Fountain open, to the Blood and Spirit of Chriſt, for new Strength from Day to Day, to Crucifie the Fleſh, to Continue the Warfare, and Maintain the Conflict. That Sin yet remains in the Soul, is conſiſtent with your Reconciliation to God; and your Sence of this, with his Acceptance of you. Yea, I am perſwaded, there's never ſuch a Diſcovery of Corruption, as after Forgiveneſs; when the Grace of God hath enlightned the Soul. But which part do you ſide with? Do you Condemn, Bewail, Oppoſe, Reſiſt, Strive, Watch, Pray, Fight, and Endeavour the Mortification of that

Corruption, that yet remains, after the Hopes of Pardon? You ſhall then by the Grace of Chriſt hold on, and be more than Conquerors: You ſhould Apply to him, and Exalt his Power, as able to deſtroy the Works of the Devil. He has promiſed, and undertaken it, that no Iniquity ſhall be charged to your Condemnation. No old Stories ſhall be repeated, no latent Diſpleaſure harboured, no former Quarrel revived. If thou return to God with all thy Heart, he will never upbraid thee with thy former Sins; tho' Men may. But if you can hope, that God forgives you, you'll eaſily bear *that*, and little mind it. Can you doubt of this Fulneſs of Pardon, when God hath ſaid, he will hide and blot out our Sins, ſo as *When ſought for they ſhall not be found*: And that he will *put them as far from us, as the Eaſt is from the Weſt*; that *None of them ſhall be mentioned again unto us*, Pſal. CIII. 10. Jer. XXXI. 34.

Fifthly, This Pardoning Mercy is *Mercy indeed* to a Returning Sinner, becauſe all his *unknown* and *forgotten Sins* ſhall be pardoned, as well as thoſe he hath particularly confeſs'd, agravated, and repented of. As he that breaks the Law in one Point is guilty of all by the wilful Contempt of Divine Authority; ſo he that is abſolved in one Point, is forgiven in all. It were otherwiſe in vain to be forgiven, and abſolved as to *ſome Sins*, that might damn us, if there's *any one* left

that would do it. He that is under Condemnation for one Sin, is liable to Eternal Death: But Divine Forgiveneſs is entire and full. There are Sins of Good Men, that ariſe from Humane Frailty, and not from any evil Purpoſe of Heart; as Sins of *Ignorance*, which if we had known, we would not have committed; or of *ſudden Surprize*, that we did not Obſerve; or fell into by the violent hurry of Temptation, before we had time to think what we were doing; of ſuch Sins we ſhall be often guilty, while we are in the World; and we are bid to ask daily Pardon for 'em; and then they ſhall not break Covenant between God and Us.

But there are Many Sins that we have *forgotten*, for which we were never Humbled in Particular: And yet if we truly Repent of thoſe we do know, and call to mind, *our forgotten Sins ſhall be forgiven.* For God will Pardon us like himſelf; Forgive us like *a God*; not according to *our Knowledge*, but *His own.* And as He is greater than our Hearts, to know much more againſt us, than we can remember againſt our ſelves; ſo He is greater than our Hearts, to forgive even thoſe Faults which our Hearts and Conſciences do not Recollect. He knows the Value of Chriſt's Blood and Merits, to Forgive all our Sins. And by unfeigned Faith, we are intereſted in the Virtue of it. God hath more Thoughts of Mercy in him, than

we

we have had of Rebellion againſt him: *Pſal.* XL. 5. *Thy Thoughts to us-ward*, (ſpeaking of his Thoughts of Mercy) *are more than can be numbred.* They have been from Everlaſting, and reach to Everlaſting; whereas 'tis but as of yeſterday, that the oldeſt Sinner began to rebel againſt God. There is no Compariſon. And this leads to the *Laſt Obſervation* from thoſe Words, *He will abundantly Pardon.*

Laſt Obſ. That God will not only ſhow Mercy to Returning Sinners, ſo as to Forgive them, but *He will abundantly Pardon:* He will *Multiply Forgiveneſſes.*

The Apoſtle ſpeaks of *the Grace of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, that it was *exceeding abundant towards him*; ὑπερεπλεόνασε, *with Faith and Love, which is in Chriſt Jeſus*; 1 Tim. I. 14. *ſuperlative, ſuperabundant Grace*; not only ſufficient for the Pardon of his Sins; but of multitudes more beſides. And accordingly in other places we read, not only of the *Grace of God* in Forgiveneſs, but of his *abounding Grace*, of *the Riches of his Grace*; Yea, of the *Exceeding Riches of his Grace*, Epheſ. I. 6, 7. and this joyn'd with *tender Mercies*; with *Loving Kindneſs*; and with *Multitudes of Mercies.* And here I may ſhow,

Firſt, In what Reſpects, God will abundantly Pardon Returning Sinners.

Secondly, Conſider what Reaſon we have to

to believe it, and be firmly perſwaded of it.

Thirdly, What is the Abuſe of this Bleſſed Doctrine.

Fourthly, I ſhall aſſiſt you to make a Right Improvement of it.

Firſt, In what reſpects God promiſeth *Abundantly to Pardon*, or to Multiply Forgiveneſſes. And this I might ſhow as to *Perſons*, and as to *Things*.

Firſt, If we Conſider the Extent of Forgiveneſs as to *Sins*: With Reference to Time, and Place, and Perſons, *&c.* As to *Time*, from the firſt Promiſe of the Seed of the Woman, made ſoon after the Fall, to the End of the World, this door of Mercy is open for Returning Sinners. As to *Places*, The Goſpel is appointed to be Preach'd to every Creature, in every part of the World: Neither Jew, nor Gentile, Bond, nor Free, Barbarian, or Scythian, are excepted. The Goſpel of Grace by Chriſt Jeſus is *every where* the Power of God, to Pardon, and Salvation, unto *all* that believe. As to *Perſons*, none ſhall Periſh for want of a ſufficient Price, for their Ranſom; for want of a ſufficient Satisfaction to the Juſtice of God: But wherever the Everlaſting Goſpel is preached, *He that Believeth ſhall be ſaved. Whoever will, may come, and take of the Waters of Life freely.* Whoever will Accept of the Mercy of Chriſt, upon the holy Terms of the Goſpel, ſhall

receive

receive Remiſſion of Sins, Joh. III. 10. *God hath ſo Loved the* loſt *World, that Whoſoever Believeth on Chriſt ſhall not periſh, but have Everlaſting Life*, Joh. XII. 46, 47. *I am come* (ſaith our Lord) *a Light into the World, that Whoſoever Believeth in me ſhould not abide in darkneſs. If any Man hear my Words, and believe not, I judge him not, for I came not to Judge the World, but to ſave the World.* 1 Joh. II. 2. *He is a Propitiation for our Sins, and not for ours only, but for the Sins of the whole World.* And when we Conſider what ſort of Perſons, (even the chiefeſt and vileſt of Sinners,) many of thoſe have been, who have been Pardon'd and received to Mercy; We muſt needs ſay, there is no Reſpect of Perſons with God, as to this Matter. And there are a great Multitude of theſe, conſidered in themſelves. For even of Martyrs and Confeſſors, that came out of great Tribulation, and had waſhed their Robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb, there is a *Vaſt Multitude, ſuch as none could number of all Nations, and Kindreds, and People, and Tongues*, Rev. VII. 9, 14.

Secondly, He doth abundantly Pardon, conſidering the *Sins forgiven*. He is a God pardoning Iniquity, Tranſgreſſion and Sin; *i. e.* Sins of all ſorts. Let the Kinds, Numbers, Repetitions, Aggravations be what they will. There is a Multitude of tender Mercies to forgive, and abundant Vertue in the Blood of

of Chriſt, to cleanſe from all Sin. If the multitude of Tranſgreſſions could make a Pile, as high as from Earth to Heaven, God's pardoning Mercy is above the Heavens: His Thoughts are above ours in this matter of Forgiveneſs, as far as the Heavens are above the Earth. No Sin but *final* Impenitence, Ungodlineſs, and Unbelief, is ſhut out from Pardon; for the Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt is attended with that, and therfore never to be forgiven.

And as to Sins *after Repentance* and *Pardon*, God hath promiſed to multiply Forgiveneſſes, to heal Backſlidings, and therfore invites Men to return, with a Promiſe of Pardon. *Return ye backſliding Children, and I will heal your Backſlidings.* In ſome early Days of the Chriſtian Church, the *Novatian Doctrine* ſpread, that denies Repentance and Pardon to Sins after Baptiſm; upon which Account 'tis thought, many good Men delay'd their Baptiſm as long as they could, that they might not defile their Garments after they were waſhed. It ſeem'd to have taken its Riſe from the Miſunderſtanding of *Heb.* 6. the Beginning. But any ſuch Doctrine as would diſcourage Men's Repentance, and return to God, after they have ſinned, muſt needs be of very dangerous Conſequence to the Souls of Men. I confeſs, it is a diſmal Symptom, to fall often into wilful Sin, to repent and then ſin again; to repent and ſin in a Circle. This rather argues

argues an Intention of ſinning again, than a Deſign of leaving it. But for ſuch as have return'd to God, and been forgiven, and yet by the Power of Temptation have afterwards fallen, there is great Encouragement for their Return, and Ground to hope for Forgiveneſs. *For if any man ſin, we have an Advocate with the Father, even Jeſus Chriſt the Righteous, who was a Propitiation for our Sins.* If *any Man* ſin, 'tis not to encourage to ſin, but to prevent *Deſpair* after the Commiſſion of it. And ſince we are to forgive one another, as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven us, it would never have been made our Duty to forgive our Offending Brother once and again. Yea, unto *ſeventy times ſeven*, if there were no Mercy with God for Returning Backſliders. You are allowed, and commanded in ſuch a Caſe, to return to God, and to ſue out your Pardon; and you ought to believe you ſhall find Welcome, and that your Backſlidings ſhall be healed.

There is need of urging this, becauſe Sins after Repentance, and after Vows and Reſolutions, and Sacraments, *&c.* not only defile, but diſturb the Conſcience; and you can't preſently approach to God with Comfort? What then ſhould you do? Give up all for loſt? Run into Exceſs of Riot? and ſay, *There is no Hope*; therfore let us walk after the Imagination of our own Hearts? No, by no Means. But by renewed Acts

of

of Repentance towards God, and of Faith in the Blood of Jesus, return to God, and seek Forgiveness. I grant in such Cases, it is hard to do this with any Encouragement and Hope: Our Hearts misgive us, and well they may; we shall have a thousand Jealousies and Fears: And it can't be otherwise. However, God's Thoughts are not as ours, *He will abundantly pardon* Returning Sinners; tho' you have abus'd his Grace, tho' you have dishonour'd his Name, revolted after Forgiveness, slighted the Redeemer Christ, griev'd his Spirit, given Advantage to the Devil, deserv'd to be cast out of his sight; tho' you have broken your solemn Vows, and broken your Peace thereby; yet let such remember, that God will show Mercy to Returning Sinners, and he will *abundantly pardon* 'em. He will heal their Backslidings, and make them loath themselves, and be confounded for all their Abominations, even *After he is pacify'd towards them*, Ezek. XVI. *the last*. You know the kind Language God us'd to *Ephraim*, Jer. XXXI. 18, 20. *Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, he is my dear Son, he is a pleasant Child*, (or rather, is he not so?) *though I spake against him, I remember him still, my Bowels are moved for him, I will surely have mercy on him, saith the Lord.* Read with Thankfulness, *Mic.* VII. 18, 19. *Who is a God like unto thee? that pardoneth Iniquity, and passeth by the Transgressions of his Remnant, and retaineth not his*

his Anger for ever, becauſe he delighteth in mercy? He will turn again, and have compaſſion on us, and will ſubdue our Iniquities, and caſt our Sins into the Depths of the Sea. And how ſweet is the Repentance of ſuch a Returning Backſlider, that is kindly melted, humbled, and broken, and brought to the Foot of God, with Hope of Mercy through Chriſt? The Contrition of ſuch a Soul, is made up like that of *Mary Magdalen*, of Tears and of Kiſſes, of Sorrow and of Love, of Humility and Hope, of Confuſion and Confidence, of Shame and Joy. And how will ſuch a Soul love much, to whom much is thus forgiven?

In ſhort, God doth abundantly pardon, and multiply Pardons, as to the Forgiveneſs of *many Sins*, in that never any one Sin was forgiven to any Man, to whom this was not made good. Numberleſs Sins are forgiven wherever *one* is. They are more than the Hairs of our Head, or the Sands on the Sea-ſhore. Well might the Pſalmiſt ſay, *Have mercy on me, O Lord, according to thy loving Kindneſſes, and according to the multitude of thy tender Mercies*, Pſal. LI. 1. I will *abundantly* pardon, (ſaith God here) and in another place, *I will cleanſe them from all their Iniquities, whereby they have ſinn'd againſt me, whereby they have treſpaſs'd againſt me*, (ſaith the Lord) *Jer.* XXXII. 8. Who can underſtand his Errors before Converſion and ſince? by Omiſſion and Commiſſion, in Thought, in Word and

and Act? How long did God wait on ſome of us? What various Methods did he uſe to bring us home? How graciouſly did he receive us at firſt? and after many Provocations receive us again? Surely if *we* find Mercy with God, any of us, he muſt abundantly pardon us, and multiply Forgiveneſſes. And becauſe 'tis not ſo eaſie a thing to believe this, I proceed to the Second Particular, to Conſider what Reaſon we have to be perſwaded of this.

Secondly, Upon *what Grounds* may we be firmly perſwaded of this Truth, *That God will thus multiply Pardons?* 'Tis certain, to an humbl'd, awaken'd, convinced, penitent Sinner, it muſt be glad Tydings of great Joy; that his Caſe will admit of Hope. That he ought not to deſpair, that there is a *poſſibility* he may find Mercy with God, if no more: But to have the Riches of God's Grace diſplay'd, to have a free and general Invitation made to all the Hungry and Thirſty, the Weary and Heavy laden; to have a Promiſe of Mercy and of Forgiveneſs, whatever thy Sins have been. What matter of Rejoycing is this? This will anſwer a thouſand Objections, which otherwiſe you could not tell what to ſay to. This is proper to revive the moſt drooping Spirits, to make them adore God, and admire his glorious Grace: This may cauſe them to think honourably of him, ſeek earneſtly

neſtly to him, and thankfully accept his offered Mercy; as poor, wretched, periſhing, condemn'd, undone Creatures; toward whom the God of all Grace will magnifie his Rich and Undeſerved Mercy. Therfore, be perſwaded to believe it; conſidering ſuch things as theſe.

Firſt, That there are large and expreſs Promiſes, and moſt aſtoniſhing Inſtances, in the Holy Scriptures, to Encourage your Faith. He that beſt underſtands his own kind Thoughts to the Children of Men, to the chiefeſt of Sinners, hath aſſured you he will not only have Mercy, but *abundantly* pardon; and that where Sin hath abounded, Grace ſhall much more abound toward all of them, who will accept of Mercy by Jeſus Chriſt; ſo as God may not loſe the Glory of it. You think it very hard to be perſwaded of this, but hath not God told you, that as far as the Heavens are above the Earth, ſo are his Thoughts and Ways above yours? And tho' your Sins be as Crimſon and Scarlet, that they ſhall be as Snow and Wool; and that *To the Lord our God, belong Mercies and Forgiveneſs, tho' we have rebell'd againſt him.*

Have we not Inſtances of this, as to others? of the worſt of Men and Women, that have been waſhed and juſtify'd, through the Blood of Chriſt, and Spirit of Chriſt? of Sinks of Sin, that have been made Veſſels of Mercy? Many Examples in the Old Teſtament and

in the New, of *Jews* and *Gentiles?* What Folly, and what aggravated Sin was *David* guilty of, after the Knowledge of God? and what great Sins before Converſion was the Apoſtle *Paul* charg'd with? You have been ſometimes told, that 'tis an Inſtance of God's Wiſdom and Kindneſs, to record the the Example of *David*'s Fall. Some it may be, think it were better left out, leſt it ſhould encourage Sinners, but doubtleſs many a Man would have periſhed in Deſpair, and made away himſelf, if it had not been for the Example of *David's Repentance*; and God's Forgiveneſs of him, after ſuch hainous Tranſgreſſions.

Secondly, God hath declared this to be his Nature and Delight. He proclaims it as part of his Name, *Exod.* XXXIV. 5, 6. to be *The Lord God, Gracious and Merciful, Slow to Anger, and Abundant in Goodneſs and Truth, forgiving Iniquity, Tranſgreſſion and Sin.* He is pleas'd in the Exerciſe of his Mercy, he delights to be Gracious, and takes pleaſure in them that hope in his Mercy. And therfore what pleaſeth him, and he delights to do, he will do *abundantly*. There is an Inexhauſted Treaſure of Grace in God, *Exceeding Riches of Grace*, and unſearchable Depths of Mercy and Grace. *God, who is rich in mercy*, (ſaith the Apoſtle) *for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in ſins, hath quickned us together with Chriſt*, Epheſ. II. 4, 5. And

all

all the Saints are set forth, as studious and thoughtful about the Glorious Dimensions of God's Grace, as endeavouring to comprehend the *Breadth*, *Length*, *Height*, and *Depth* of this Grace, that passeth Knowledge, *Eph.* I. 8. The *Breadth* of his Love, in covering such a multitude of Sins, and pardoning such a multitude of Sinners: The *Depth* of it, reaching us in the Depth of our Sin and Misery: The *Length* of it, from Everlasting to Everlasting: The *Height* of it, in raising us from a deserved Hell, to an infinitely Glorious Heaven. Love, Grace and Mercy, are his Nature and Delight. 'Tis above our Thoughts, and past our Comprehension. We read, that his *Judgments* are *unsearchable*, and his Ways past finding out; 'tis as true of his Ways of Mercy, as of any. By that Name *Judgments*, sometimes his Mercies are call'd, *Psal.* XXXVI. 5, 6. *Thy Judgments are a great deep*; to show the Meaning whereof, the Psalmist breaks out, *O Lord, how excellent is thy Loving Kindness to the Sons of Men, that put their trust in thee?* All the *Merits of Christ* are call'd *the Mercies of God*, *the sure Mercies of David.* God is said to be *Rich* in Mercy, and no other Attribute of God is call'd *his Riches*, but his Goodness, Grace and Love.

Thirdly, God useth variety of Arguments throughout the Scriptures, to perswade us to believe this. He not only urgeth us from his own Example, and obliges us to forgive

our Treſpaſſing Brother, (if he repent) unto ſeventy times ſeven, but with the greateſt Kindneſs, he beſpeaks us to believe his Compaſſion, to be perſwaded of his Tenderneſs and Love. He employs a great deal of Rhetorick to that purpoſe. *Why ſayeſt thou, O Jacob, and ſpeakeſt O Iſrael, my way is hid from the Lord, and my Judgment is paſſed over from my God; haſt thou not known, haſt thou not heard? that the everlaſting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the Earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?* Iſa. XL. 7, 8. He appeals to Heaven and Earth, to the Dumb and Inſenſible Creatures; that his Ways are equal, that ours are unequal; he offers, he invites, he calls, and expoſtulates, and complains of our Backwardneſs to believe him; he pleads, and promiſeth, and adds his *Oath* to his Word, *As I live ſaith the Lord, i. e.* As I am a Living God, *I take no pleaſure in the death of him that dyeth, but rather that he return and live, than go on and dye. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye dye, O Houſe of Iſrael?* He's repreſented as with Sighs and Groans, bewailing the Obſtinacy of Sinners to their own Deſtruction. *O that they were wiſe, and would conſider this! O that there were ſuch a Heart in them? O that they knew the things that belong to their peace, before they are hid from their Eyes!* How kind and encouraging are ſuch Paſſages?

Fourthly, Conſider, this is one great End of God's Patience, and Forbearance, and of his

his continuing the Preaching of the Word, and the Ordinances of the Goſpel; that Sinners might be led to Repentance, by the Hopes of Forgiveneſs. How many Years hath God waited on ſome of you? Should not the Long-ſuffering of God, that hath a Tendency to Salvation, encourage you to believe, that there is Mercy and Forgiveneſs with him? What quick Diſpatch hath he made with others, while he hath ſpared you? He hath taken ſome, in the Act of their Vile Abominations; many in the very height of their Wickedneſs; and hath refus'd to give them further time and ſpace to repent: He hath call'd ſome to Judgment in their Youth, ſoon after they had broken the Fetters of their Education, caſt off the God of their Fathers, and begun to indulge themſelves in youthful Luſts: Many beſure, (not greater Sinners than you) are gone to their place, while he yet waits to be gracious to you. He offers you Pardon and Life, when he might have condemn'd you to Remedileſs Wrath, and put it in Execution long ago. He continues to exerciſe great Patience and Power in forbearing you. Is it not with this kind Deſign, that it might lead you to Repentance, that you might turn to him, ſeek after him, and intreat his Pity before it be too late? May you not infer thus much from his Long-ſuffering? Did he bear with thee, when thy Heart was hard as a Rock? and

thou would'ſt not hearken to any Treaty of Peace? and will he not accept thee *now* thy Heart begins to be contrite, and broken with Sence of Sin, and Sorrow for it? Did he bear with thee while Sin was thy Delight? and will he not be gracious if thou ſeek him, *now* Sin is become thy Burthen? Doth he continue to call thee by his Word? and Commiſſion his Miniſters to tell thee in his Name, that if thou return, he will abundantly pardon? Doth he order them to beſeech thee for Chriſt's ſake, and in his ſtead, that thou would'ſt be reconciled to God? and can you ſuppoſe he is inexorable? If a King ſhould ſend one of his Attendants to a Condemned Priſoner, ſaying, "Go tell ſuch "a one, let him come to me for his Par-"don, and he ſhall have it; my Son hath "interceeded for him, and made his Peace, "tho' he hath forfeited his Life, and deſerv'd "to dye, and I might put the Sentence in "Execution to Morrow; yet let him come, "and confeſs his Sin, and ask Forgiveneſs, "and I will pardon him. Yea, tell him, I "deſire, I entreat, that he would come. I "beg that he would have pity on himſelf, "and not refuſe me: I earneſtly pray, and "beſeech him; I muſt take no Denial, he "muſt come. What Kindneſs and Condeſ-cention were this! You know how to apply it. 'Tis as certain unto all of you, by the Preaching of the Goſpel, as if you were ſpoken to by Name,

But

But if you reject the kind Offer of the Grace of the Gospel, and will not return from your Evil Ways, but go on and put it to the venture; (after such a Merciful Invitation, and that so often repeated) consider then, what a Hazard you run, and if you hold on, how dreadful your Doom will be. All the Ministers of Christ, instead of Blessing you in the Name of the Lord, must pronounce against you all the Curses of the Law, and all the additional Curses, denounced against the Despisers of the Gospel. And must say unto you, *Anathema Maranatha*, Cursed in this World, 'till the Coming of Christ; and when he comes, Accursed from his blessed Presence, into Everlasting Destruction. Yea, all the Angels of God, all the Churches of Christ, all the Saints on Earth and in Heaven, will adore Divine Justice, and can have no Compassion on you, if you go on to despise the Grace of God, and will not be drawn with the Cords of his Love.

Fifthly, To perswade you, that God will abundantly pardon; Consider how valuable a Price was paid for your Redemption, that you might have Forgiveness. When you think of the Freeness of this Mercy to you, think also that it cost the precious Blood of Jesus to Procure it. And by the great Propitiation for Sin, which he hath made, God hath glorify'd his Holiness and Justice, and may now glorifie his Mercy and Grace, in

pardoning and ſaving Sinners, without leſſening the Honour of his Authority and Government, or impeaching any of his Attributes and Perfections. You may come, and beg Mercy for the ſake of Jeſus Chriſt, ſaying, "Lord, ſave me, for thy Mercy's ſake, "I am a Vile Sinner, a Rebellious Creature, "not only an unprofitable Servant, but a hainous Criminal: I have nothing in my ſelf, "but Matter of Shame, and Humiliation; no"thing of any good, but what thou haſt gi"ven me. There's nothing in any of my "Services, but need the Sprinkling of the "Blood of Jeſus, to make them accepted. "But there is Redemption, even the For"giveneſs of Sin through the Blood of Je"ſus. *Lord*, Here is the Blood ſhed for Ex"piation of my Sins: *Lord*, Here's the Price "paid for my Reconciliation, here's a per"fect Righteouſneſs to cover me, here's a "compleat, Attoning Sacrifice, Chriſt's Me"rit, Righteouſneſs, and Interceſſion, and "Grace can ſave me. O let me be found in "him, accepted in him! Did I diſhonour "God formerly, by my aggravated Sins? "Chriſt my Redeemer hath honour'd him "more by his Death, than ever I diſhonour'd "him by my wicked Life.

Is it not a Trouble to you, to think with what Affection and Delight you ſinned, with what Deliberation you committed ſuch and ſuch Sins? Oh! remember that Chriſt de-

"lighted

lighted to do the Mediatorial Will of his Father: He was ſtraitned 'till he drank of the bitter Cup, and was baptized with his own Blood. He knew before hand, all that he was to do and ſuffer for our Redemption, and yet willingly undertook it: Did you ſin with much intenſeneſs of Spirit, ſo that your Heart was in it? Have your Crimes been (many of them) Mental, Spiritual, Inward Sins? (like thoſe of the Devil, which are worſe than Senſual, Carnal Ones) Remember, Chriſt's Sufferings lay much in his *Soul* alſo. His Spirit, his Soul was heavy unto Death, *&c.*

And whatever Unworthineſs you may apprehend of the Mercy offer'd you, remember 'tis *Free Mercy*. You are call'd and invited to receive it, without Money and without Price. If you are weary and heavy laden, and ſenſible of your Unworthineſs; if you ſee your need of his help, are deſirous of it, and willing to yield your ſelves to his Conduct; to be ſaved in a way of Free-grace, ſo as to give him the entire Glory of your Salvation; you ought to believe that God will ſhow you Mercy, and abundantly pardon you. He hath glorify'd his Mercy in the purchaſe of Forgiveneſs by Chriſt, in the Publication of it in the Goſpel, and in the Application of it to particular Sinners upon *Faith* and *Repentance*, or Repentance and Faith; (I ſcruple not to put *either* firſt)

ſince

ſince they are inſeperable, and are never parted: And both are abſolutely needful. Repentance towards God, and Faith in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that at once we may give God the Honour of his Authority and violated Law, by our Repentance; and of his rich Grace in the Goſpel, by our Faith in Chriſt. And can any thing be *more free* to us, than to be forgiven, in this Method, on theſe Terms? to have all our Tranſgreſſions blotted out for his Name's ſake? and to be waſhed and cleans'd in the Fountain of Chriſt's Blood, when we have nothing but our own miſerable, and wretched Caſe to move his Pity? He juſtifies us freely by his Grace, and found a way to do it, with Honour to his own Name. What a ſtrange Paſſage is that of the Prophet? *Iſa.* XLIII. 22, 23, 24. *Thou haſt not called upon me, O Jacob, but haſt been weary of me, O Iſrael, thou haſt not brought me the ſmall Cattle of thy burnt Offerings, neither haſt thou honour'd me with thy Sacrifice; thou haſt bought me no ſweet Cane with Money, neither haſt thou filled me with the fat of thy Sacrifices, but thou haſt made me to ſerve with thy ſins, thou haſt wearied me with thine Iniquities.* What might now be expected, but that God ſhould ſay, Therfore I will not hear thee when thou calleſt, I'le make thee a Sacrifice to my Wrath, I'le puniſh thee according to thy Deſert: But 'tis quite otherwiſe, for it follows in *Verſe* 25. *I, even I, am he,*

that

that blotteth out thy Transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember thy Sins. When the God whom we had offended by Sin, is become a God of Forgiveness, in such a way and method of rich and glorious Grace, we need not doubt but his Heart is in it, and therfore that he will abundantly pardon. He might have exacted the Punishment of Sin, when he gave his only begotten Son, to be a Propitiation for our Sin, and accepted his Suffering instead of ours. There could be nothing move him to this, but his own Grace and Love: And therfore we ought to believe, that he's ready to receive returning Sinners unto Mercy for Christ's sake.

Sixthly, As consequent to this, Consider, that by believing, that God will abundantly pardon returning Sinners, we give Honour and Glory to God. He is pleas'd and honour'd by our giving Credit to his Word, and hoping in his Mercy. Whereas if we distrust his Promises, and Declarations of Grace, we not only disobey his Order, but refuse that which he delights in, and whereby he's glorify'd. By not believing his Promises of Pardon, we do what we can to frustrate the Command of Faith in Jesus Christ, and the Promse of Salvation by him. Yea, to disappoint the great Design of Christ's Coming into the World, which was to save Sinners. We undervalue the rich Provision

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he hath made for our Encouragement; we gratifie the Devil, in keeping off from the only Remedy which Christ hath procured: We do in effect make God a Liar, by disbelieving the Record he hath given of his Son, not setting to our Seal that God is true, 1 *John* V. 10. *John* III. 33. If we honour and please God by our Faith and Hope, more than by any thing else; we do as much dishonour and displease him by our Unbelieving Despondency, and Dispair. Yea, all the Sins of your past Life, that make you fear God will never forgive you, are not cloathed with higher Aggravations of Guilt, than your doubting of the pardon of them, in Case you unfeignedly return to God, and believe in Christ.

Lastly, You ought to believe it for the Reason added, *Ver.* 7. because *God's Thoughts are not as ours*; but as far as the Heavens are above the Earth, *&c.* We can't think so kindly of any, who have injur'd us: as God thinks of us who have offended him. Nor can we think to what degree God is able to forgive our greatest Provocations, and show Mercy to the vilest Sinners, that will return. We are prone to revenge, we are hardly reconciled; we are apt to return Evil for Evil; we are not easily brought to Forgiveness. But *My thoughts are not as yours*, (saith God) "You know not how far my Mercy can

"reach,

"reach, I am God and not Man. The di-
"ſtance between God and Man, between the
"Creature and Creator, is infinitely more
"than between Heaven and Earth. What
"if you can't imagine, that ever I ſhould
"have ſuch Thoughts of Mercy for poor Sin-
"ners: Do you conſider, how high the Hea-
"vens are above the Earth? ſo are my
"Thoughts and Ways higher than yours;
"They are like my ſelf, *infinite*.

And how many, by their own Experience of God's kind and gracious Dealing with them, who with holy Wonder and Thankfulneſs, have acknowledg'd and atteſted the Truth of this: "Many a time have I call-
"ed my ſelf a Prodigal, (to uſe the Words
"of an * Excellent Perſon) a Companion of
"Swine, a miſerable, hard-hearted Sinner,
"unworthy to be called his Son, when he
"hath called me Child, and chid me for
"my queſtioning his Love, he hath readily
"forgiven the Sins, which I thought would
"have made my Soul the fuel of Hell; he
"hath entertain'd me with Joy, with Muſick
"and a Feaſt; when I better deſerv'd to have
"been among the Dogs without his Doors.
"He hath embrac'd me in his ſuſtaining, Con-
"ſolatory Arms, when he might have ſpurn-
"ed my guilty Soul to Hell, and ſaid, De-
"part from me thou Worker of Iniquity,

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* Mr. *Baxter* of Converſing with God in Solitude, 4to. pag. 363, 364.

"I know thee not. O little did I think, that "he could ever have forgotten the Vanity and "Villany of my Youth; yea, ſo eaſily have "forgotten my moſt aggravated Sins. When "I had ſinned againſt Light, when I had re-"ſiſted Conſcience, when I had frequently "and wilfully injured Love, I thought he "would never have forgotten it: But the "greatneſs of his Love and Mercy, and the "Blood and Interceſſion of his Son hath can-"celled all. O how many Mercies have "I taſted, ſince I thought I had ſinned "away all Mercies! How patiently hath he "born with me, ſince I thought he would "never have put up more? —— Tho' I "injure and diſhonour him by loving him "no more, tho' I oft forget him, and have "been out of the Way, when he hath come "or called me; tho' I have diſobediently "turned away mine Ears, and unkindly re-"fus'd the Entertainments of his Love; and "unfaithfully play'd with thoſe, whoſe Com-"pany he forbad me; yet he hath not di-"vorc'd me, or turn'd me out of Doors. "O wonderful! that Heaven will be familiar "with Earth! and God with Man! the High-"eſt with a Worm! and the moſt Holy with "an unconſtant Sinner! Man refuſeth me, "when God will entertain me: Thoſe whom "I never wrong'd, reject me with Reproach; "and God whom I have unſpeakably inju-"red, doth invite me, entreat me, and

"com-

"condescendeth to me, as if he were be-
"holden to me to be saved. Men that I
"have deserved well of, abhor me; and God
"that I have deserved Hell of, doth accept
"me. I upbraid my self with my sins, but he
"doth not upbraid me with them. I condemn
"my self for them, but he condemns me not,
"I have Peace with him, before I can have
"Peace with my Conscience.

Object. But after all these endearing Expressions of the Grace of God, (may some say) we can't tell how to believe, *'tis hard to be fully perswaded of this.* Consider therefore, the Verses following the Text, where there's this Objection obviated. You say, you can't have your Hearts duely affected with these Declarations of God's Grace, you can't be brought to accept this Mercy, to close with this Offer, to be encouraged by such a Promise and trust in it: It is therefore added, as directly suitable to such a Case, *Verses* 10, 11. *As the Rain cometh down, and the Snow from Heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the Earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give Seed to the Sower, and Bread to the Eater. So shall my word be, that goeth forth out of my Mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.* That is, As the Heavens do not give Light and Heat, and Snow in vain; but

but cauſe a promiſing Spring, and a fruitful Harveſt: So, ſaith God, my Thoughts of Grace, manifeſted by my Declarations of Mercy, and Promiſes of Forgiveneſs, ſhall have Efficacy and Influence to make you believe; to enable you to hope and truſt in my Mercy; and ſo to be quiet and ſatisfy'd, that your great and hainous Sins ſhall be forgiven. The very Publication of this Grace, ſhall be attended with a Power to bring Souls to believe it. *I know my Thoughts toward you, are Thoughts of Peace, and not of Evil*; to give you a gracious End, and raiſe your Expectations of it, and they ſhall accordingly be fulfilled. The Declarations of this Mercy ſhall be credited, my Word of Grace ſhall not be *in vain*; it ſhall take hold of dejected, deſpairing Souls, and raiſe them to Faith and Hope. 'Tis with this Encouragement we publiſh the glad Tydings of Salvation, and invite Sinners to return to God by Jeſus Chriſt, with an Aſſurance of finding Mercy. I ſay, 'tis with this Encouragement, that we beſeech them to be reconcil'd to God, and aſſure 'em that he's ready to forgive: 'Tis in Hope, that by the Spirit accompanying the Declaration of the Word, concerning this Forgiveneſs with God, many Souls might be attracted and won, perſwaded and overcome, and ſo prevail'd with to return to God, and believe the glorious Riches, Freeneſs and Abundance of his Mercy. God

grant

grant we may find more and more, ſuch fruits of preaching the Goſpel. On the other hand, I beſeech you take heed, how you turn your Backs on this Mercy of God, and the Offer of it: Beware how you ſhut your Ears againſt his gracious Invitation, when he thus proclaims and publiſhes his Readineſs to forgive. Take heed how you go on in Sin, after God freely tenders you the Forgiveneſs of all your Sins, if you will return. With the greateſt Serioufneſs I muſt tell you, that one ſuch Sermon of God's forgiving Grace and Mercy, rejected, ſlighted, and miſimprov'd, may be of more dreadful Conſequence to the Souls of thoſe that hear it, and make light of it, than I am able to expreſs.

APPLICATION.

USE 1. Let this Mercy, Love and Grace, overcome your Hearts. Conſider it again and again: Apply it ſeriouſly to your ſelves. Is the Lord thus Gracious to me, after ſo long a Rejection of him? Will he yet receive me, after ſo many Refuſals? Doth he invite and call me again, after ſo much Contempt of his Mercy and Grace? Will he yet ſhow Mercy to *me*? What ſtrange, aſtoniſhing Grace, what endearing Kindneſs is this? What manner of Love is this? How

true is it, that God's Thoughts and Ways are not as ours? That God ſhould ſpeak ſuch Language to me as this. "Tho' for "lying Vanities, thou haſt forſaken thine "own Mercies, yet return to me: Tho' "thou haſt play'd the Harlot with many "Lovers, yet return: Tho' thou haſt turned "a deaf Ear to many Reproofs, yet thy "Caſe is not deſperate. Tho' I offer my Son, "and Life by him, (*He that hath the Son, "hath Life*) and ye would not: This Offer "was repeated Sabbath after Sabbath, for "many Years, yet you would not hear it; "you would not ſtoop to the Terms; yet "return unto me, I will pity and pardon "you, I will *abundantly pardon.* Long ſince "I might have ſworn in my Wrath, you "ſhall never enter into my Reſt. I might "have ſaid, *Let them alone*, to be undone "by their own Obſtinate, Fooliſh Choice. "I might have reſolv'd, never ſuch an Offer "ſhould be made to you more. Never any "Sermon about it ſhall ever do you good more. "*But I am God and not Man, my Thoughts and "Ways are not as yours.* I invite you again, "I beſeech you turn and live, do not go on "and dye. God ſpeaks this Language to every one of you, the worſt of you, who hear me this Day.

Let none therfore think or ſay, 'tis *too late* for him or her; there's *now* no more Mercy

Mercy for me. For Chriſt yet ſtands at the Door and knocks, tho' you have refus'd formerly, and ſhut the Door formerly, yet *now* if you will open the Door, he will come in and ſup with you, and you with him; *Rev.* III. 20. Nay, tho' he has not taken Poſſeſſion of thy Heart, he knocks at thy Door by his Spirit, and is ready to enter; tho' you refuſe *him*, he does not abandon you. Tho' his Kindneſs and Love hath been ſlighted, yet his Mercy is tendered ſtill, and his Patience prolonged. And will you reſolve to go on thus? Will ye not return? Are you content to periſh, rather than come to Chriſt for Life? rather than give him the Glory of your Salvation? Will you rather dye in your Sins, than be beholden to him for your Forgiveneſs? rather than apply to God for it, when he hath provided an All-ſufficient Saviour, and offer'd you that Salvation freely, which coſt ſo dear to purchaſe? After this, for a poor, proud Sinner, to turn his Back upon this Grace of God, to ſcorn this Saviour, and diſdain to be ſaved by him; ſaying in Effect, I will have none of your Chriſt, none of his Grace, none of his Mercy: I had rather enjoy my Luſts, continue in my Sin, and put it to the Venture; how provoking is ſuch Guilt? and how righteous will be the Condemnation of ſuch obſtinate Sinners?

Secondly, Apply your ſelf therfore to God in Chriſt, by Earneſt Prayer. He hath the Words of Eternal Life, he is a Prince and a Saviour, to give Repentance as well as Pardon. The Spirit of Faith, is the Spirit of Jeſus Chriſt; he can open thy blind Eyes, and ſoften thy hard Heart; he that commanded the Cripple to take up his Bed and walk, at the ſame time gave him Power to obey. There is a Divine Spirit and Power, even the Spirit of Life and Power in Chriſt Jeſus, that accompanies the Preaching of the Goſpel; this may be hoped for, this ought to be valu'd, deſir'd and begg'd. You ought never to deſpair of God's Grace, to enable you to believe, when it continues to be your Duty to believe on Chriſt; and it cannot but continue to be ſo, unleſs the Goſpel be repeal'd. Therfore beg with all your Hearts, that you may be enabled to look to him, and be ſaved; to come to him, and find Reſt to your Souls; to believe on him, and receive Remiſſion of Sins. For by beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Chriſt, you may be changed into the ſame Image, from Glory to Glory.

Beg an Underſtanding to know him that is true, and with all your Hearts to believe on him, that you may aſſent to his Word, conſent to his Covenant, reſign to his Will, and truſt in his Promiſe, depending on his Readi-

Readineſs, Willingneſs, Power and Faithfulneſs to ſave you: Saying, "Lord, draw me, "and I will run after thee; Lord, thou art "willing to receive Sinners, make me will-"ing to receive thee: Lord, thou haſt re-"ceived Gifts for Men, even for the Rebelli-"ous; O communicate of thoſe Gifts of Grace "to me! I ſee my need of Chriſt, and what "Reaſon I have to come to him; O lead me "to him, and work in me to will and to "do of thine own good Pleaſure!

Thirdly, If you begin to find the Spirit of Chriſt breathing on your Souls, that have been yet unperſwaded; if you have any Motions of the good Spirit of God, by the preaching the Word, or by any other means, take heed you thankfully cheriſh and entertain them. When you find your Souls begin to turn towards Chriſt, if you find any Beams of Heavenly Light break in upon you; any Inclinations ſtarted of applying to him, beſure to obey the Voice of his Spirit. Open every Door of your Souls to receive his Light. When he works any Conviction of Sin, any ſence of your need of a Saviour, any Deſires after him, or Purpoſes of Heart to leave your Sins, and give up your ſelves to God, to be ſaved by Chriſt, according to the Goſpel; for your Souls ſake encourage ſuch Thoughts, cheriſh ſuch Suggeſtions. Beware how you turn them off, but preſently and

thankfully ſtrike in, ſaying, "Lord, I yield, "I am overcome; I have long enough, and "too long refus'd thy Grace, diſobey'd thy "Will, and reſiſted thy Spirit. Thou haſt "often knockt, and I would not open; O "*now* enter thou Bleſſed of the Lord, and "take Poſſeſſion of my Soul! Let Chriſt "dwell in my Heart by Faith, and his Spirit "form a Temple there, and reſide there as in "his own Dwelling for ever. Lord, art thou "yet willing, (after all my Provocations) to "ſhow Mercy, and abundantly to pardon? "Willing to be my God and my Saviour? "Bleſſed be God, I am now willing to be "thy Servant. Thy powerful Grace hath "made me willing: Thy Spirit open'd my "Eyes to ſee my ſelf undone, to ſee that "Chriſt is able and willing to ſave me; I "hope, I am now ready to receive him, "willing to embrace him as *Chriſt Jeſus my* "*Lord.* I come to thee, O God, as to the "Fountain of Life, to be quickned and "cleans'd, to be waſh'd, juſtify'd, ſanctify'd "and ſav'd from Sin and Hell, by the Blood "and Spirit of Jeſus, through the Free Mer-"cy and Grace of God.

But to Conclude, If after all, there be any Such here as are not, will not be perſwaded to forſake their Evil Ways, and turn to God in Chriſt; Let them conſider, that the longer they continue in their Obſtinacy

and

and Unbelief, under the preaching of the glorious Grace and Mercy of God to Sinners, ſo much the more Danger they are in of being loſt for ever. For their Minds muſt needs be more blinded by ſinning againſt the Light: Their Hearts more hardned, by miſimproving that which ſhould have ſoftned them: The Power of Conſcience is weakned, after ſo many Struglings and Combates, that they muſt needs have had with their own Conſciences; after ſo many Conteſts between Corruption and Conviction, between Truth in the Mind, and Corrupt Inclinations in the Heart. Eſpecially, if they have formerly been awakned, and there have been ſome Fears and Hopes, with good Deſires, and other Affections formerly ſtirr'd; if by the Common Operations of the Holy Spirit, they have had ſome ſerious Concern about their Salvation, and all this is worn off and gone; the Caſe of ſuch is very bad, and their Recovery the leſs hopeful; becauſe their Repentance is the more unlikely. And if they perſiſt, their Doom will be intolerable. But it is to prevent this, as to thoſe who may be in ſuch a dangerous Caſe, that I thus ſpeak. And therfore I moſt earneſtly invite, beſeech and entreat them; however Wicked and Unrighteous they have been, not to make light of this further Offer of the Grace of the

Gospel: And that by no means, they would despair of finding *Mercy* with God; even *Now*, if they will Return to him with all their Hearts, whatever their past Sins have been. If *Now* they will return, God will *abundantly pardon: For his Thoughts are not as ours*, &c.

THE

THE Third Sermon.

ISAIAH, LV. 7, 8.

Let the Wicked forſake his Way, and the Unrighteous Man his Thoughts, and let him Return unto the Lord, and he will have Mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly Pardon.

For My Thoughts are not your Thoughts, neither are your Ways, My Ways, ſaith the Lord.

IN Two former Diſcourſes, I have conſider'd this double Precept, or Injunction of Duty, which concerns Sinners of all ſorts; under the two Names of *Wicked* and *Unrighteous*, that they muſt *forſake their Evil Ways and Thoughts; and return to the*

the Lord, which are the two parts of unfeigned Repentance. I have alſo conſider'd the encouraging Promiſe, that thereupon God will *have Mercy*, and will *abundantly Pardon*. And I have now to conſider, what *Ground* we have to believe this: Becauſe *God's Thoughts are not as ours, nor his Ways as ours*, &c. But there remains ſomething of the *Application* of the Second General, That if the Wicked forſake their evil Ways and Thoughts, and return to God; he will not only forgive, but *He will abundantly pardon.*

I. *USE.* Be thankful to Heaven for this good News; that God will thus mercifully treat returning Sinners. He might have inſiſted on the Terms of the violated, firſt Covenant, to the Ruine of all Mankind: He might have left us, as the fallen Angels, without the Propoſal, Promiſe, or Offer of a Redeemer: *But God ſo loved the World, that he gave his Son, that whoever believeth on him ſhould not periſh, but have Everlaſting Life.*

When we think of the Caſe of the fallen Angels, who are reſerv'd in Chains of Darkneſs to the Judgment of the Great Day, and compare it with our own, who have a Proclamation of Mercy and Grace by the Goſpel; we have Reaſon to adore the diſtinguiſhing Goodneſs of God to us. If a few poor, inconſiderable People in a Kingdom, of the meaneſt ſort; ſhould be found guilty of Treaſon

Treaſon againſt a Prince; when there are Multitudes of the Nobility and Gentry, who have likewiſe rebell'd againſt him; and a Pardon ſhould be offer'd to thoſe of the poorer, meaner ſort; while the Nobles and Great Men are all Executed, and not a Man of them receiv'd to Mercy; would not this be Aſtoniſhing Goodneſs to the others? Eſpecially if thoſe Great Men, the Principal Subjects of the Kingdom, were Condemn'd for *one Offence*, for one Act of Treaſon; and the others forgiven *many Tranſgreſſions*, and receiv'd to Favour and Honour, after many Years of Rebellion. You eaſily know how to apply it.

How thankful ought we to be, that we are not left in the remedileſs Condition of Devils? that there is a Sacrifice offer'd for Sin, a full Attonement made, a ſufficient Price paid, a Fountain open'd, a new and living Way, for God to be glorify'd in the Forgiveneſs and Salvation of Returning Sinners, that believe on his Son. It is matter of Continual Admiration, and Thankful Praiſe, that we have Forgiveneſs this way. Can we have a fuller Evidence of the Evil and Malignity of Sin, or of God's Diſpleaſure againſt it? and conſequently of the Worth and Value of a Pardon; than by the Sufferings, Blood and Sacrifice of Chriſt? And what ſtronger Proof, or clearer Evidence of God's Readineſs to forgive Sin, than the giving

giving of his Son to dye for our Sins, to cleanſe us from *all Sin*; even the moſt hainous, grievous Offences: Becauſe his Mercy through the Mediator is greater than the Sins of the whole World.

Let us with Hearty Thankfulneſs adore him, for this glorious Myſtery of his Love and Grace: And that we may be Thankful indeed, let us apply it to our ſelves in particular. Let us think of our own miſerable Caſe under the Guilt of Sin, and the Curſe of God. Let us think of the many thouſand Talents we owe, without being able to pay one Farthing; of the Innumerable Crimes we are guilty of; and that the Wages of every one is Death: And that all the Creatures in Heaven and Earth could not procure the Forgiveneſs of one ſinful Thought. If you think you have, or ever had any ſerious ſenſe of the Evil of Sin, and your loſt undone Condition as Sinners, how thankfully ſhould you receive theſe glad Tydings of Mercy, by Jeſus Chriſt? But if you have gone further, and have actually receiv'd the Attonement; if you are brought under the Bond of the Covenant; if you are united to Chriſt by Faith, and ſo intereſted in the ſure Mercies of *David*; and by Forgiveneſs deliver'd from Condemnation, what *Special Thankfulneſs* is due from ſuch? When there are comparatively ſo Few, to whom the Goſpel is preached, but do receive this Grace

Grace of God in vain? "*Lord*, Who, and "what am I, that I ſhould have good hope "through Grace, of the Forgiveneſs of my "Sins? *of mine*, that have been more aggra- "vated than the Sins of Others: When O- "thers, not greater Sinners, (it may be, "not ſo bad) ſhall periſh for ever; and ne- "ver be forgiven: When it may be, ſome "of my Companions, and Accomplices in "Sin, are cut off by Death, without Repen- "tance and Pardon! Were not Others call'd, "and invited as well as I? But he hath o- "pen'd mine Ears, and Heart, to receive him; "and ſo hath pardon'd me, while others are "condemned. O Admirable, and Aſtoniſhing "Grace!

Secondly, Take heed of abuſing this Declaration of Grace to the worſt of Sinners.

I. *Firſt*, As any Countenance to Sin, or Encouragement to continue in it: *Shall we ſin*, becauſe God is ready to forgive Sin; *that his Grace may abound? God forbid*; Rom. VI. 1. Far be it from us, let it be an abhorred Thought. 'Tis needful to mention this, becauſe in many Inſtances, the moſt pure and holy Doctrine may be perverted to patronize Sin. We read, that the Continuance of the Courſe of Nature, was made a ground of Truſt by the Pſalmiſt, as an Adorable Evidence and Inſtance of his Faithfulneſs and Truth. *Pſalm* CXIX. 89. *Thy Word is ſettled in the Heavens, and thy Faithfulneſs*

to

to all Generations. And yet ſome Atheiſtically abus'd it; 2 *Pet.* III. 4. ſaying, *All things continue as they were: Where is the Promiſe of his Coming?* The Apoſtle ſays, *The Time is ſhort, and the Faſhion of the World paſſeth away*; therfore, let them that have ſuch and ſuch Relations, Poſſeſſions, and Employments in the World, carry it as if they had none. Whil'ſt others abuſe this, and ſay; the Time is ſhort, *Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we may dye.* So here, God is ready to ſhow Mercy to returning Sinners, therefore, *Let the wicked forſake his way*, &c. Others turn this Grace of God into Wantonneſs; and will venture the more boldly upon Sin, becauſe God is ready to forgive. *Theſe things* (ſaith the Apoſtle *John*) *I write unto you, that ye ſin not. But if any man ſin, we have an Advocate with the Father.* There's a vaſt difference between the Remiſſion of Sins paſt, and an Allowance of Sin for the future. We may take Comfort in the abounding Grace of God, and his Readineſs to forgive; though we muſt dread the Thought of venturing on Sin, that his Grace may abound in the Forgiveneſs of it. This is contrary to all Gratitude and Ingenuity; and to the true Nature of Faith and Repentance. And there can hardly be a more dangerous Symptom of damnable Ungodlineſs, than for any to preſume to ſin upon this Conſideration; *That they hope they ſhall be forgiven.*

given. The Apoſtle *Jude*, ver: 4. ſpeaks of ſome ſuch, *Who turn the Grace of God into Wantonneſs, denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*; and he ſaith of them, that *They were ordain'd of old to Condemnation:* For the Grace of God that brings Salvation, ought to teach us to deny Ungodlineſs and Worldly Luſts, *&c.*

This ſinning againſt God, becauſe he will abundantly pardon, is in ſome reſpects more Aggravated than the Sin of *Devils*, who will curſe God, and fly in his Face; becauſe there's no hope of Pardon. But God offers Pardon to you, and declares that he is ready to forgive. And will you dare to ſin the more? If ever you are awakened to a Senſe of Sin, this of all others will be moſt likely to ſink you into Deſpair; that you ventur'd to ſin in hopes of Pardon. For what can relieve a convinced, awakned Soul, but the Free-grace of God in the Forgiveneſs of Sin? Whereas ſuch a One may ſay, *Lord*, this very Mercy I have abus'd, I have ſinn'd the more becauſe of this Grace. And if we ſhould mention to ſuch a one, the Inſtances of *Manaſſeh*, *Paul*, &c. who after great Sins were pardoned; he will be ready to reply, that they never ſinned in hope of Forgiveneſs, or turn'd the Grace of God into Wantonneſs, as I have done.

There's Forgiveneſs with God, *that he may be fear'd*, ſerved, loved and obey'd.

But

But will any ſay, there's Forgiveneſs with God, that he may be ſlighted and neglected, rebell'd againſt, and diſobey'd? His abuſed Goodneſs will turn to the more intollerable Wrath, againſt all ſuch as preſume on his Mercy; apprehending that they ſhall find an Eaſie Pardon, tho' they continue in their Sins. 'Tis to ſin againſt the very Nature and End of God's Grace; to cut off their own Plea for it, and the general Ground of their Hope in it. 'Tis without a Promiſe, and againſt a Threatning, for any to expect Forgiveneſs, if they wilfully continue in ſin: 'Tis to pervert the whole Goſpel, to imagine that God will juſtifie the Ungodly, while they remain in their *Unbelief* and *Ungodlineſs*. Is not Unbelief a part of *Ungodlineſs*, as contrary to the moſt expreſs Command of God to believe on his Son? If ever God ſhow Mercy unto any, and abundantly pardon them; he always gives them *Repentance* unto Life, and *Faith* unfeigned.

And let ſuch remember, that as God promiſeth Mercy and Forgiveneſs to Returning Sinners, and that his Thoughts are far above ours, as Heaven above the Earth in this Matter; ſo his Thoughts of Anger, Wrath and Fury, againſt Obſtinate, Wilful, Preſumptuous, Impenitent Sinners, are alſo above our Thoughts, as far as the Heavens are above the Earth. *He will tear in pieces, and none ſhall deliver; he that made them will*

ſhow

ſhow them no mercy; and who knows the power of his Anger? he will laugh at their Calamity, and mock when their fear cometh. He will wound the head of his Enemies, and the hairy Scalp of ſuch a one that goes on ſtill in his Treſpaſſes, Pſal. LXVIII. 21. Prov. I. *latter end.*

II. *Secondly*, Take heed of abuſing this Doctrine of God's Grace, by admitting ſlight Thoughts of Sin, ſo as to encourage you to *delay* ſeeking after Forgiveneſs; or to ſeek and expect it *any other way*, but only through Faith in Jeſus Chriſt.

As to the Matter of *Delay*, the Uncertainty of Life, and the Uncertainty of God's giving Grace *hereafter*, to them that refuſe it *now*, is ſufficient to be ſaid here, if duly conſider'd. That which I now aim at, is to diſcourage any Hopes of obtaining Forgiveneſs with God, but *only* through the Blood, Sacrifice, and Righteouſneſs of Chriſt: There is no other Saviour, no other Mediator between God and Man. If ever you are reconcil'd to God, and find Mercy with him, it muſt be through Jeſus Chriſt. The Way and Method is fixt, and publiſh'd, and declar'd to be unalterable: There is no other Name under Heaven, but *his*, by which any Man can be ſaved: If God be gracious to any, and deliver them from going down to the Pit, 'tis becauſe he hath found a Ranſom, *Job* XXXIII. 24.

The Abſolute Mercy of God is not to be

rested in; for he hath told us in what Way and Method he will dispence his Mercy, and how we shall partake of it: That we must honour the Son, as we honour the Father; receive him as Christ Jesus the Lord, the only Mediator between God and Man; and that *If we believe not that Jesus is he, we must dye in our Sins.* 'Tis not enough to cease to do Evil, and make Restitution where you have injur'd and wrong'd any, (which yet is a necessary Fruit of Repentance;) 'Tis not a little outward Reformation, or the Performance of some Duties of Religious Worship, that before were neglected, that will be sufficient, if you overlook *Jesus Christ*, and lay the stress of your Hope, for Acceptance with God, on any thing else.

If you should fast, and pray, and weep, and mourn, and wear Sackcloath, and give all you have to the Poor, and continue a Life of Austerity and Mortification for many Years; this will not avail, if you think to pacifie God herewith, and substitute this in the room of the Blood and Righteousness of Christ, in order to Forgiveness. You will but provoke God, and dishonour the Redeemer, and deceive your own Souls. 'Tis certain, we are naturally prone to fix upon some other Bottom, enclin'd to establish a Righteousness of our own, instead of Christ Jesus, and his Righteousness. But we can never be secure from the Charge of the Condemning

demning Law, and the Challenge of Divine Juſtice, but by being united to Chriſt, intereſted in him, found in him, and accepted with God on his Account.

USE III. Let me beſeech you to pity thoſe Sinners, who are not return'd to God, and intereſted in his pardoning Mercy; and to pity ſuch, as deſiring and endeavouring to return, do yet apprehend and fear, that they ſhall never be pardon'd.

Firſt, As to thoſe as are yet under the Guilt of Sin, and are not return'd to God, nor intereſted in his pardoning Mercy: Conſider their Miſerable Caſe, and pity them: For,

Firſt, If they are not Partakers of ths abundant Pardon, there's *no one ſin* that they were ever guilty of, that is forgiven. Without Repentance, (which includes forſaking our Evil Ways, and returning to God,) there's no Forgiveneſs of any Sin: Tho' Temporal Judgments have ſometimes been diverted upon External Humiliation, no one Sin is blotted out, but through the Blood of Chriſt, who is exalted to be a Prince and Saviour, to give *Repentance* as well as *Remiſſion of Sins*: And theſe are never to be parted. Therfore if any have liv'd twenty, thirty, or forty Years in the World, or longer, whenever God comes to enter into Judgment with you, all the Sins of your paſt Life, with all their ſeveral Aggravations, will be found in the Indictment, and charg'd againſt you: You are under the Guilt of them *all*;

as much as if they were committed yesterday. As God's pardoning Mercy reaches to all the unknown, and forgotten Sins of true Penitents, as well as those which they actually remember, and repent of, so where he doth not forgive *all*, he forgives *none*. And if the Guilt of *one sin* be enough to sink thee into Hell; what is it to have Ten Thousand to answer for? If you can't stand in the Judgment, when accused but for one sinful Thought or Word, what will become of you, when you have all the numberless Transgressions of your past Lives to answer for?

Secondly, Consider, that 'till sin be forgiven, the Guilt of every unpardon'd Sinner encreases every day. The longer he lives, he is still heaping up Wrath against the Day of Wrath. Upon every failure of our Duty to God or Man, there's a Debt of Punishment resulting from it; and every New Sin is a Figure added to the Old Score. The longer therfore any one lives in an unpardon'd State, the more Guilt he contracts, and the more Crimes he has to Answer for.

Thirdly, Consider, that upon this Account, 'till we are interested in the pardoning Mercy of God; we are under the Curse and Condemnation of the Law. Whatever Advantages a Man may enjoy above Others, whatever Gifts, Reputation, Prosperity, *&c.* he's still under a Divine Curse; he's condemn'd already; and if he dye in this Condition,

dition, he muſt periſh for ever. And how ſoon may Death put a Period to all thy Hopes of Forgiveneſs? In the mean time you are under *a Divine Curſe*, that reaches to all you have, and all you enjoy: In Health and Sickneſs, Proſperity and Adverſity, where-ever you go, and whatever you do. You pleaſe God in nothing; but abuſe his Mercy, and are liable every Moment to his Wrath; and if you dye, that ſtroak of Death which ſeparates thy Soul from thy Body, will ſeparate thee from God and Heaven for ever.

And this Curſe of God will be found to be *Intolerable*, as well as unavoidable. When God deals with Sinners, as a God of Vengeance, they ſhall not be ſo weak, as to be annihilated by his Wrath; or ſo ſtrong, as to reſiſt or avoid his Righteous Vengeance; and 'tis *Everlaſting Wrath* likewiſe: Without being now reconciled to God, and intereſted in his pardoning Mercy by Jeſus Chriſt, the Wrath of God abideth on you; and will for ever abide.

Fourthly, Let me add one Conſideration more, to raiſe your Pity to Unpardon'd Sinners, and that is, their preſent deplorable Caſe, by the Accuſations of their own Conſcience. For ſooner or later a guilty Conſcience will ſpeak: Eſpecially as to thoſe that live under the Preaching of the Goſpel. *The Sinners in Zion ſhall be afraid, Fear-*

fulneſs ſhall ſurprize the Hypocrite: They may try various Methods to ſtop the Mouth of Conſcience, by the Noiſe and Clatter, and Hurry of Worldly Buſineſs; they may think to forget their Miſery, and patch up a kind of Peace for a little while; but this is a falſe Peace, that if not ſpeedily broken, will end in Everlaſting Anguiſh: And if it be, (as a thouſand to one but it will be,) what Trembling, Horror, and Deſpair muſt be expected? How low will ſuch ſink, when they awake out of their Security? How will they roar and cry out under the Terrors of the Lord? How bitterly will they complain of the Burden of Sin, as a Mountain on their Backs? Of the Wounds of Sin, as ſo many poyſon'd Arrows in their Hearts? How will their Joynts tremble, their Lips quiver, and their Hearts ake? When they ſhall ſee their Sins ſet in Order before them, and can't hope for Pardon? But whether they feel their Miſery or no, their Caſe is diſmal, for they do but dance about the bottomleſs Pit, and the next Hour may tumble in. Conſcience may awake ſooner than you believe, and e're long it will. Conſcience, I ſay, which is an Accuſer, none can ſilence, a Judge that none can bribe. And if they will but give themſelves Time and Leiſure to think; a gloomy Darkneſs, like the Shadow of Death muſt now overſpread their Souls: They have no Relief, but by endeavouring not to think

of

of their Danger. Are not ſuch to be pity'd? O do what you can to awaken and ſave them!

Secondly, There's another ſort, who need your Compaſſion, *i. e.* They who deſire and endeavour to return to God, and ſeek after Chriſt, but apprehend there is no Forgiveneſs for them. Tho' God will abundantly Pardon Others; they reckon *they* ſhall never be intereſted in his pardoning Mercy. They hear of God's multiplying Forgiveneſſes to Others; but dare not think, they ſhall have a Share in it. They read of a Saviour, but believe they ſhall never be ſav'd by him; they hardly dare look into the Bible, leſt they read their own Condemnation. All the Terrible Things in the Scriptures againſt Impenitent Unbelievers, againſt Apoſtates and Obſtinate Sinners, they apply to themſelves. They dare not look into the Grave, nor think of dying, becauſe of what follows, in the final Judgment of Chriſt, and the Everlaſting Deſtruction of Sinners. If they had any former Peace, they reckon it was all Deceit, Miſtake and Preſumption: For after all their Profeſſion, and Hearing, and Reading, and Praying, *&c.* they tell you, *They ſhall periſh*, and be condemn'd as Hypocrites; and *There's no Mercy for them.*

O with what Bowels of Pity and Compaſſion, ſhould we conſider the Caſe of ſuch! And treat them with the Spirit of Meekneſs and Gentle-

neſs! "Chriſt is the Saviour of Sinners, but "He is none of mine, (they ſay) for I heard "his Goſpel Grace declared, but did not accept "it; I outſtood my Day of Grace, and the "Things of my Peace are hid from mine Eyes; "He call'd me, but I would not come; and "'tis now too late. *O 'tis now too late!* He "knock'd, and I would not open; and now "the Door is ſhut againſt me. I am given "up to a Hard Heart, *&c.* The very Thought of *Heaven*, and the Happineſs of the Saints, doth but terrifie them, becauſe they think they have loſt it, and ſhall never come there: As well as the Thoughts of *Hell*, which they reckon their Deſerved Portion, and that e're long it will be ſo. And that Word *Everlaſting*, Everlaſting Deſtruction, cuts them to the Heart. And well it may, if they believe it belongs to them; and that they ſhall fall under the condemning Sentence of the Judge, to paſs into Everlaſting Fire. And in ſeveral ſuch Caſes, the Devil ſtrikes in, and aggravates their Diſtreſs: He inſults over them; "What "think ye now of Sin? Where's the Pleaſure "and Advantage of it now? To what pur-"poſe hath been all your Praying, Hearing, "attending on Ordinances, Coming to the "Lord's Table, *&c.* You are fit indeed to come "to the Lord's Table; you have come *Unwor-"thily*, you have ſeal'd your Damnation by it, "you have eat and drank Judgment to your "ſelves by it again and again.

And

And ſuch is their Darkneſs and Perplexity, they know not what to Anſwer, but conclude *They are loſt*, and the Goſpel hid from them; that Chriſt is not their Freind, and will not be their Saviour. Some of them will tell you, they are as ſure of it, as if they were in Hell already. 'Tis as true, they ſay, as if they had heard his Condemning Sentence: He hath ſhut up his Bowels, and his Tender Mercy for ever from them: And there's nothing remains, but a fearful Looking for of Wrath, and Judgment, Tribulation, and Anguiſh: And that all their preſent Darkneſs, is but the Forerunner of Eternal Darkneſs: And what they feel now, is nothing to what they fear. And if they be in ſuch Agonies *now*, O what will it be to lye in the Flames of Hell? *Wretched Miſerable Creatures!* they know not how to live, and they dare not dye; leſt Death ſhould open the Door to Eternal Damnation. And theſe Fears are heighten'd, when ever they meet with thoſe Chriſtians, who have any Hopes of Heaven; becauſe they ſay, Chriſt ſaveth *Others*, but will not ſave *them*. Do not ſuch as theſe deſerve our Compaſſion? (And there be many ſuch in this City.) Though Natural Melancholy, and Bodily Indiſpoſition give ſome Occaſion, at leaſt to heighten ſuch Terrors and Diſtreſs in ſeveral; yet the ſenſe of paſt Guilt, and the Temptations of Satan muſt not be overlookt. What I have to ſay on the Third General,

of

of *God's Thoughts not* being as *ours*, will be ſuitable to their Caſe.

But before I proceed to that, let me mention ſomething for the *Tryal*, and *Examination* of our ſelves, whether we are intereſted in this Forgiveneſs or no?

Would you know whether your Sins are forgiven, whether you are intereſted in this Promiſe of multiply'd Pardon? Conſider in the General, and Examine your *Repentance towards God, and Faith in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, Acts II. 21. * The Eſſential Acts of *Repentance* are, Godly Sorrow for all our known Sins; and a ſincere Purpoſe of Heart, to turn from all Sin to God; with Anſwerable Endeavours of Univerſal Holineſs. The three Acts of ſaving *Faith in Chriſt* are, (1.) An Aſſent of the Mind to Scripture-Revelation, concerning Chriſt. (2.) The Conſent of the Soul, embracing and receiving him upon his own Terms. (3.) A Relyance and Truſt on him for Pardon of Sin, and Eternal Life. More particularly,

I. You may Conſider your *Repentance*, and enquire how you ſtand affected to Sin? Have you been under any deep Conviction of the Evil of Sin, as to cauſe not only ſome Sorrow but Hatred and Deteſtation of it? Have you ſeen

* See the Sermons of the *Forgiveneſs of Sin*, by the Reverend Dr. *Bates*, 8vo. Where the whole Doctrine of Pardon is more accurately laid down.

ſeen your ſelves loſt and undone by reaſon of Guilt, ſo as abſolutely to need pardoning Mercy? Is the Heart of Stone taken away, and a Heart of Fleſh given? What Humiliation for Sin, and Self-abaſement in the Apprehenſion of your Vileneſs, have you ever had? Have you been diſquieted and burden'd under the Senſe of Sin, ſo as to condemn your ſelves; and ſee that you are loſt without the Free-Mercy of God in Chriſt? Owning the Righteouſneſs of God, if he ſhould caſt you off; and yet looking up to God through Jeſus Chriſt with Hope? 'Tis true, there is a great Difference in the Expreſſions of Sorrow and Humiliation for Sin, which ſome make beyond others; but all are made to ſee the Evil of Sin, ſo as to be cur'd of the Love of it; to humble themſelves, and acknowledge their Vileneſs.

Have you thereupon been brought to an Ingenuous *Confeſſion of Sin*, Pſal. XXXVIII. 18. with Earneſt Prayers to God for Forgiveneſs, when you remember the peculiar Aggravations of many of your Crimes? How long continued in, againſt how many Helps, and Warnings, Calls, and Counſels, and Obligations to the contrary? How ſmall the Temptation, how frequent the Repetition; and yet how much Wilfulneſs, notwithſtanding the various Methods of God's Grace and Providence to reclaim you? Such a Conviction cannot long be conceal'd and hid. Enquire

quire therfore, what Effects it hath had, to bring you into the Preſence of God, there to confeſs and bewail your Folly? O what a Beaſt, what a Fool, what a Wretch have I been, thus and thus have I ſinn'd againſt Heaven? How low ſhould I abaſe my ſelf in the Preſence of God? How unworthy am I to lift up mine Eyes to the Throne of his Glory? How wonderful is his Patience, that I am yet alive?

If you have a ſerious Senſe of Sin, you will not be able to keep Silence; for that is contrary to the Confeſſion of Sin, mentioned *Pſal.* XXXII. 5. *I acknowledg'd my Sin unto thee, and mine Iniquity have I not hid.* While he kept ſilence, or did not confeſs his Sin, his Bones were vex'd, his Heart was diſquieted. But upon a free and full Confeſſion to God, his Spirit was calm'd, and he could look through his Penitential Tears, with Hope to God's Mercy-Seat. God requires this Confeſſion in order to Forgiveneſs, *Jer.* III. 12, 13. *Return, O backſliding Iſrael, ſaith the Lord, and I will not cauſe mine Anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful, ſaith the Lord, only acknowledge thine Iniquity,* &c. And *if we confeſs our ſin,* (the Apoſtle tells us) *God is faithful and juſt to forgive them,* 1 John I. 9. And the more free and particular we are in our Confeſſion of Sin to God, ſo much the better. This cannot be without a Holy Sorrow and Shame, in the Remembrance of

your

your paſt Folly, your Sinfulneſs and Pollution, your Ingratitude and Rebellion againſt God, and not meerly upon the Account of any Penal, Afflictive Conſequences, by which you have ſmarted. For Godly Sorrow will diſtinguiſh it ſelf by the Principles and Motives of it, to be another thing, than meerly bowing down the Head under the Burthen of Affliction. There will be a Holy Shame and Confuſion of Face, in the ſenſe of what you have done, and what you have deſerv'd; ſo as to tremble at the Thought of committing the like Sins again; and to fear the Temptations that might draw you to it; and make you reckon every Burden of Affliction tolerable, in compariſon of the Burden of Sin. Conſidering what we have done, and againſt whom we have ſinned: Conſidering what a fooliſh Choice we have made, what Grace we have ſlighted; what Mercies we have abuſed; and how unworthily we have behaved our ſelves to God, our Owner, Maker and Sovereign; and unto Chriſt, our Saviour and Redeemer; and unto the Holy Spirit, who hath been ſtriving with us: Hereupon we condemn our ſelves, and beg that God would not condemn us; we are made ſenſible of our Unworthineſs of the leaſt Favour; and as the Prodigal or Publican, beg free Mercy: Owning his Righteouſneſs, if he ſhould deny it. Thus judging our ſelves, we juſtifie God; and hereby give Glory to him.

This

This will make his Mercy the more welcome, and our Prayers the more Earneſt. Such a Sence of Sin we muſt carefully improve, to encreaſe our Hatred of it, Reſolutions to forſake it, and Endeavours againſt it for the future: To promote and preſerve Humility, and a low Eſteem of our ſelves, and entire Submiſſion to all the Word and Will of God: To help us to perform every Duty, and joyn in every Ordinance, with more Meekneſs and Self-abaſement; and to bear every Affliction as deſerving a thouſand times worſe than we ever yet ſuffer'd. This will make us feel more our need of Chriſt for Pardon, and ſanctifying Grace; and make us have daily Recourſe to him, for the Influence of his Blood and Spirit: And it will make us ready upon any juſt Occaſion, to confeſs our Sins to *Men* alſo, if it appear to be for the Honour of God, that we do ſo; this will make us more compaſſionate toward Others, who have fallen by Temptation. This will raiſe our Thankfulneſs for every little *Favour*, for every beginning of *Mercy*, for every thing of *Grace*, that we do, or may receive from God: And cauſe us readily to embrace and welcome the Goſpel Diſcovery, and Revelation of God's Forgiveneſs of Sin.

This ſerious Conviction of our Guilt and Folly, will make us own our ſelves, *the Chiefeſt of Sinners*, as knowing the ſpecial Aggravations

vations of our own Sins beyond what we know of Others. I do not know as to other Men, their Advantages or Diſadvantages, Helps or Hindrances by Education, Knowledge, Admonition, Counſel, Afflictions, and ſpecial Obligations, as I do my own. I do not know the Strength, the Urgency, the Importunity of their Temptations; whether if I had the like, I might not have been as bad or worſe. I do not know the Force and Power of Bodily Conſtitution, inclining 'em ſtrongly to ſome Sins. I do not know whether their Sins have been committed upon ſuch ſmall Temptations, as many of mine have been: Or whether againſt ſo many Motions of God's Spirit; or whether they continued ſo long without Repentance; or againſt ſo many Helps to repent. I do not know whether there was ſo much of Wilfulneſs and Deliberation in Other Men's Sins; as I know there hath been in my own. I cannot tell, but as to other Mens Faults, there may be ſomething to leſſen, to extenuate, to mitigate their Guilt, that doth not appear: It may be, their Principles and Intentions were not ſo bad; and there was more of Infirmity, more of Miſtake and Error, more of Weakneſs and Surprize in their Sins, than I know there was in mine. I may hope they did it ignorantly, or but ſeldom; or that the Conſequence is not ſo bad, as to God's Diſhonour, and the Miſchief done to others; I may hope

hope a great deal of what I hear of their Crimes may be falſe, or that God hath given them Repentance, tho' I know it not. And have Reaſon to conſider as to ſeveral, that they have otherwiſe many Excellent Qualifications, many Uſeful and Valuable Things in 'em, for which they ought to be eſteem'd. And ſo judging charitably of others, with ſerious Scrutiny into our ſelves, we ſhall ſee Reaſon to own our ſelves *the Chief-eſt of Sinners.* Such an humble Senſe of our ſinful Vileneſs, is a part of true Repentance, and an Evidence of Forgiveneſs.

II. We cannot ſuppoſe this, without *Forſaking of Sin*, to which the Promiſe of Pardon is made. If God hath forgiven you, he enables you by his Spirit to walk in his Ways, to ſtrive, and watch, and pray againſt thoſe Sins, which with a Godly Sorrow you have confeſs'd and bewail'd, ſo that you ſtand in Awe of God's Authority; and allow your ſelves in no wilful known Sin; or in any Negligent Omiſſions of poſitive, plain Duty; but endeavour to walk in all his Commandments blameleſs.

However, becauſe of the Imperfection of this in the Beſt, Examine what Conflicts you have, what Oppoſition you make againſt Sin, by Renewed, Spiritual Principles. Is it the Deſire, Care and Endeavour of your Souls, to have the Power of Indwelling Sin weak-

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ned, and the Habits of Grace ſtrengthned, and your Obedience more Uniform? Endeavouring to grow in Grace, eſpecially in that Grace which is contrary to your particular Sin and Corruption? Is there an Earneſt Deſire, and Conſtant Reſolution, and Endeavour to bring forth Fruits worthy of Repentance? *The Wicked muſt forſake his Way, and the Unrighteous Man his Thoughts, if God doth abundantly pardon:* And to forſake it, is more than a bare Refraining from Sin; he muſt give over all Acquaintance with it, and watch continually againſt it. Whoſoever retains *any one* Beloved, Darling Sin, cannot be ſaid to forſake Sin, tho' he refrain from *all others.* He muſt forſake it, ſo as to return to God, and walk in a contrary Path. It muſt be forſaken as to the Affection and Love of it, as well as the Outward Practice. Then we forſake Sin indeed, when we loath it, and hate it, and carefully watch againſt it. As a Man is ſaid to forſake his Meat, (not when he cannot get it, or come by it) but when he has no Stomach to it; ſo doth he forſake his Luſts, (not when he hath no Opportunity) but when he hath no Affection; when there is an Habitual Enmity in his Heart againſt it, and a conſtant Care in the Life to avoid it.

Is there no Sin but you are deſirous to know, and part with? Do you love the Holy Image of God, wherever you diſcern it? and labour after a greater Conformity to the Di-

vine Life? Is it the daily Burden of your Hearts, that you inwardly ſanctifie God no more, and glorifie him ſo little in the World? Are your Thoughts, Deſires, Opinions, and and Deſigns chang'd? The Bent of your Souls, and the Courſe of your Lives altered? Can you ſay, *My Heart is inclin'd to keep thy Statutes always, even to the end?* Pſal. CXIX. 112. *I eſteem all his Commandments concerning all things to be right?* and am deſirous to know the whole Will of God, that I may do it? And if in particular Inſtances by Temptation, you turn out of the Way, and contract Guilt, are you reſtleſs and uneaſie, 'till you return to God? Can you ſay with the Pſalmiſt, *I have kept the Way of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from him; for all his Judgments were before me, and I did not put away his Statutes from me; I was alſo upright before him, and kept my ſelf from mine Iniquity*, Pſal. XVIII. 21, 22, 23. I confeſs, as to Sins that by *the Temperament and Conſtitution of the Body*, we are more inclin'd and tempted to, than to other Sins; a Total Victory is not to be expected, ſo as in no Degrees to fall into ſuch Sins after Repentance. Take heed in ſuch Caſes, that you riſe again ſpeedily by Repentance; that you walk ſoftly and humbly; and that the principal Tendency of your Repentance and Prayer be againſt thoſe Sins: And you will gradually get Strength againſt 'em: So as to ſay, that *no Iniquity hath Dominion over you*; that you are

not

not the willing Servants of Sin, ſo as to love it, and deliberately to allow it; but the Deſire of your Soul is to be freed from it, to have Sin ſubdu'd, as well as forgiven?

III. What can you ſay, as to the Receiving, Loving, and Prizing of Chriſt, by whom we have Forgiveneſs? Have you heartily Accepted of him in all his Offices, as offered in the Goſpel? Aſſenting to his Doctrine, as a Teacher ſent from God, and our great Prophet? Relying on his Sacrifice and Mediation, as our great High-Prieſt? And ſubjecting to him as Lord and Ruler? This is *Receiving him as Chriſt Jeſus the Lord.* This is an Honour due to him, for the Pardon and Salvation he hath procured for us: And God hath made it neceſſary to our Intereſt in the Benefits of his Death. Do we aſſent to the Doctrine of Salvation, reveal'd and publiſh'd by Chriſt, and atteſted from Heaven, as certainly true? That Jeſus is the Chriſt of God, and *Whoſoever believeth on him ſhall not periſh, but have Everlaſting Life?* Hereupon are we brought to truſt to the Mercy of God in Chriſt, in Hopes of his Salvation, which is freely tendred unto Sinners in the Goſpel? Do we ſubject our ſelves entirely to him, as one whom God hath exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give Repentance and Remiſſion of Sins? Reſolving to be ſway'd by his Authority, and rul'd by his Direction, and follow

him as our Captain and Commander, Guide and Saviour, as long as we live? Endeavouring in Heart and Life, to be well pleasing in his Sight, that whether we live or dye, we may be *His?*

If your Sins are forgiven, 'tis for Christ's sake. Consider what Application have you ever made to him, for the cleansing Virtue of his Blood? Since if you are washed, if you are pardoned, it must be through the Blood of the Lamb; have you look'd to him, whom you have pierced, and mourn'd, and been in Bitterness for him, as one that is in Bitterness for his first born? *Zac.* XII. 10. Have you lookt upon a Crucify'd Saviour, Bleeding, Groaning, Dying for Sin, to reconcile us to God, and turn us from our Iniquities? Have you been answerably affected with the Sufferings of Christ, and improv'd thereby in your Hatred of Sin?

IV. *What Thankfulness to God, and what Love to Jesus Christ the Redeemer, doth the Hope of Forgiveness excite in you?* You read how the Penitent in the Gospel *Loved much, because much was forgiven*, Luke VII. 47. How did St. *Peter* appeal to Christ after the Forgiveness of his Sin; *Lord, thou that knowest all things, knowest that I love thee.* Your Love to Christ, and every thing that relates to him, will be a good Argument of the Forgiveness of Sin: For having Peace with God, the Love of Christ is shed abroad in our Hearts. How

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have your Hearts been affected with Thankfulneſs to God, for the Riches of his Grace in this Forgiveneſs? For the Purchaſe of it, for the Offer of it; and for any good Hope of your ſpecial Intereſt in it? What admiring Thoughts have you of the Height and Depth, Length and Breadth of the Love of God in Chriſt to loſt Sinners? With what Thoughts do you Conſider the Curſe of the Law, the Terrors of Death, the Power of Satan, and the Wrath of God? (From all which you are deliver'd by Chriſt.) With what Affection do you Contemplate the Innumerable Glorious Priviledges, Benefits and Bleſſings, that accompany this Forgiveneſs? With what Admiring Love to the Redeemer, do you from time to time review his Condeſcenſion and Humiliation? How low he ſtoopt, and how readily? How great things he ſuffered, and how willingly? Even to drink the Dregs of that bitter Cup, (which but to taſte of) would have made Men and Angels ſtagger into Hell. With what Frame of Spirit, can you conſider Chriſt offer'd upon the Croſs for you, making his Soul a Ranſom for you? When you Conſider with particular Application to your ſelves, *He gave himſelf for me, ſhed his precious Blood for me.* "O my Soul, 'twas that I might eſcape Con-
"demnation; that I might be reconcil'd to
"God, that my Crimſon and Scarlet Sins might
"be pardoned; that my Guilty, Polluted,

"Miſerable Soul, might be reſtor'd to the "Image of God, and Communion with him. What Affections, what Joy have you from ſuch Thoughts? Eſpecially at the Lord's-Table, when you conſider his Body broken for you, his Blood ſhed for the Remiſſion of your Sins, wounded for your Tranſgreſſions, bruiſed for your Iniquities, that by his Stripes you might be healed?

V. Moreover, *How are you affected with the Sins, that you hope God hath pardon'd?* Do your Souls melt with a Godly Sorrow for thoſe Crimes, that you hope are forgiven? What penitent Mourning doth the Pſalmiſt expreſs in *Pſal.* 51. which was penn'd after God aſſur'd him, that his Adultery and Murder ſhould be forgiven; and after the Prophet had told him, *The Lord hath put away thy Sin; O Lord have Mercy upon me, and waſh me, and cleanſe me, and blot out my Tranſgreſſion: Againſt thee, thee only have I ſinned, and done this Evil in thy Sight,* &c.

What Influence hath God's free Mercy in pardoning Sin, upon you, as to Shame and Sorrow for it? Doth the Thoughts, that after all thy Provocations God will be reconciled, humble and ſhame thee the more? To this purpoſe, you know the Holy Spirit is promiſed in the Times of the Goſpel, *Ezek.* XVI. 63. *That thou may'ſt remember, and be confounded, and never open thy Mouth any more, be-*

becauſe of thy ſhame, when I am pacify'd toward thee, for all that thou haſt done, ſaith the Lord. Is this the Language of your Hearts? "He "might have condemn'd me to Hell long "agoe, but through the Precious Blood of "Jeſus, I have Hopes of Forgiveneſs. O what "an Ungrateful Wretch have I been! What "Love have I deſpiſed! Againſt whom have "I ſinned! How have I rebell'd againſt the "God of Love and Grace, and griev'd his "good Spirit! Againſt what Bowels of Mer-"cy have I ſpurn'd? I am aſtoniſhed at the "Mercy of God in Chriſt, offer'd to ſuch a "Rebel as I am: I am confounded at my own "Vileneſs, that ſuch Hainous Iniquities ſhould "be blotted out, that ſuch numberleſs Ini-"quities ſhould be forgiven; that after I had "ſo often, and ſo long, and ſo wilfully turn'd "my Back upon him, he ſhould yet call after "me, and ſay, *I am he, behold I am he, that "blotteth out thy Tranſgreſſion for my own Name "ſake, and will remember thy ſins no more.* That "when God ſaw me, and might have pu-"niſhed me; might have made me an Exam-"ple of his Juſtice here, or might have ſent "me quick to Hell; or might have left me "unto Hardneſs of Heart, to treaſure up "Wrath againſt the Day of Wrath; that he "ſhould freely forgive me all, and be gra-"ciouſly reconcil'd to me, and ſpeak Par-"don and Peace to my Soul. O Wretch "that I have been! O Abominable Sin-

ner! I abhor my ſelf in Duſt and Aſhes.

We find this Exemplify'd in the Temper and Spirit of thoſe, to whom the Mercy and Grace of God is diſcovered, eſpecially in the Apoſtle *Paul*. He aggravates his Sin, and owns himſelf the *Chiefeſt of Sinners*; and never more ſo, than when he is thinking, and ſpeaking of Chriſt's Coming into the World to ſave Sinners; and how wonderfully he called him, and ſhow'd Mercy to him. Read this at large, 1 *Tim.* 1. 14, 15, 16, 17. And the ſight of God's Mercy, and Senſe of his Pardon, is in it ſelf proper to raiſe an Admiration of Free Grace; and to humble the Soul before God. It is proper to encreaſe our Deteſtation of Sin, and make us loath our ſelves. That which raiſeth our Love to God, muſt needs raiſe our Hatred of Sin, and Sorrow for it. Now *Faith* will make us Love much, in the Sence of having much Forgiven.

Beſides, the Inſeperable Connection between *Faith* and *Repentance* will evidence this. We ſhall never adore the Love of Chriſt, as a Redeemer delivering us from the Curſe; if we are not burden'd with the Weight of our Sins: Nor ſhall we ever give God the Glory of his Juſtice, without judging and condemning our ſelves by true Repentance. Yet the more we ſee, and apprehend of his Grace, and Love in Forgiveneſs, the more broken and contrite, the more humbled,

bled, and ashamed shall we be, of our Sins against him.

VI. Lastly, *What can you say as to the Love of your Enemies, and forgiving those who have injured and wronged you?* There is no better Evidence of God's forgiveness of your Trespasses, than that he hath given you an Heart to forgive Others, who have trespassed against you: If it be upon a right Principle, because God for Christ's sake hath pardon'd you, and obliged you to forgive Others. "*Lord*, "Was there ever such a Distance between "my Brother and me, as my Sins have made "between God and me? Were the Injuries "I resented from Others, comparable to the "Affronts I have offer'd to God? and hath "he freely for Christ's sake forgiven me?" What Influence hath such a Thought, to cure and overcome the Ruggedness, and Roughness of your Temper and Spirit towards Others? If God hath pardon'd thee, go and do likewise as to thy Brother. *For if you forgive not Men their Trespasses, your Heavenly Father hath not, and will not forgive you yours*, Mat. VI. 14. If you have a Rancorous, Bitter, Malicious, Revengeful Spirit; and will not forgive those that have wronged you; how can you expect Forgiveness from God? Do you then forgive those that have injured you, as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you? *Heartily*, and without Dissembling; *Speedily*, and

and without Delay; *Frequently* and Often, without Limitation; *Even unto ſeventy times ſeven, if our Brother offend*; that is, ſo often as he doth? And this *Throughly*, and without Reſerve; without Exception, or Equivocation; without Remembring paſt Offences, ſo as to bear them a Grudge? This, I grant, is hard and difficult Work; but the Spirit of Chriſt can enable us to do this. 'Tis the manifeſt Duty of ſuch as are forgiven, and it is a *Sign* and *Evidence* that they are ſo. Hath God forgiven me my Scarlet and Crimſon Sins? and ſhall not I put up an Injury, bear a Wrong, endure a Reproach, or an ill Turn, from my Fellow Creature? Shall I not in Obedience to Chriſt, forgive him, and paſs it by?

By theſe things, if Conſcience be faithful, you may be aſſiſted to make a Judgment of your ſelves, whether you are intereſted in this Forgiveneſs or no. And if your Sins have been many and great, whether you may, on good Grounds hope, and ſay, that God hath *Abundantly Pardon'd*.

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THE

Fourth Sermon.

ISAIAH, LV. 9.

For My Thoughts are not your Thoughts, neither are your Ways, My Ways, ſaith the Lord.

III. I Proceed to the Third General in this Paſſage, *viz.* The annex'd Reaſon, *Verſe* the 9*th.* why we ought to be fully ſatisfy'd and perſwaded, that God will thus receive Returning Sinners, and abundantly pardon them; becauſe *His Thoughts are not as ours, nor his Ways as ours*, &c. And here you may Conſider,

Firſt, How this is Diſcover'd and Expreſs'd, by a Double Compariſon of *God's Thoughts* with ours, and *his Ways* with ours.

Secondly, How 'tis ſtrongly argu'd by a moſt ſignificant Similitude; *As far as the Heavens are above the Earth*, &c.

Thirdly, The expreſs Aſſurance of the Truth

of

of all this, from the Divine Teſtimony that is added, *Thus ſaith the Lord.* That no Doubt may be made about it. The whole of this, may be compriz'd in theſe Three Particulars.

Firſt, That *the Thoughts of God*, eſpecially in the Diſpenſation of his Grace and Mercy to Returning Sinners, are *very different* from our Thoughts; and Tranſcendently *above them*, as far as the Heavens are above the Earth.

Secondly, That *the Ways of God* are unlike our Ways, and Tranſcendently above them.

Thirdly, That *God's Teſtimony* concerning his Thoughts, and Ways of Grace and Mercy to Sinners, ought to be credited and depended upon, and is a ſufficient Ground of Faith: *Thus ſaith the Lord* being added.

'Tis the firſt I principally deſign, that the Thoughts of God are not as ours, but very unlike them, and Tranſcendently above them; as far as the Heavens are above the Earth. This I ſhall Endeavour to Prove, Confirm, and Apply. And here are two Things will need a little Explication.

Firſt, How the Thoughts of God are *Different* from ours, not like them.

Secondly, How they are Tranſcendently *above them*, as far as the Heavens are above the Earth. The Firſt I ſhall conſider more Generally. The Second with more Particular Relation to God's pardoning Mercy.

I. *Firſt*,

I. *First*, They are Different and Unlike. *My Thoughts are not as your Thoughts.* There's an Expreſſion to this purpoſe in the Book of *Proverbs*, to ſet out this Difference in General, *Prov.* XIX. 21. *There are many Devices in the Heart of Man, but the Counſel of the Lord ſhall ſtand.* What is ſaid by the Prophet of God's Thoughts, is affirmed by the Wiſe Man of God's Purpoſes; that they are not as ours. Ours are vain and uncertain, his are certain, fixt, and ſtable. He makes a Threefold Difference.

First, In the Name, Ours are but *Devices*; God's are *Counſel*.

Secondly, He expreſſes them in a different Number, ours are in the Plural Number, with an Expreſſion of Multiplicity, there are *many Devices* in the Heart of Man, but God's Purpoſes are *One Regular, Uniform Council.*

Thirdly, A different manner of Exiſting is implyed; our Purpoſes are conceiv'd in the Heart, we can't bring them forth, nor give them a Being out of our own Minds: We may contrive and plot, deſign and reſolve, but ſtill the Devices are *in our own Hearts:* 'Tis not in our Power to accompliſh and bring them to paſs, to make them firm and faſt againſt Oppoſition. But the Counſel of the Lord, and every part of it, *ſhall ſtand.* So great is the Difference between God's Purpoſes and ours, God's Thoughts and Ours. But that which the Text refers to, is the

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Diſpenſation of God's Grace and Mercy to Returning Sinners. We muſt not meaſure God's Thoughts and Purpoſes by our own. The Holy Scriptures repreſent them to be beyond our Fathom; ſuch as cannot enter into our Hearts to conceive, 2 *Cor.* XI. 9.

And here I ſhall ſhow the Difference between God's Thoughts and Ours, as to two remarkable Inſtances among others. (1.) As to other Mens Sins and Offences againſt us, and ours againſt God. (2.) As to our Afflictions and Sufferings from the Hand of God. In both reſpects, our Thoughts are very *Unlike* God's, very *Different* from his.

I. *Firſt*, We muſt not judge of God's Pardoning Mercy to us, by our Thoughts and Carriage towards Others, who have offended us. For,

Firſt, We are eaſily, ſuddenly, quickly incens'd and provok'd to Anger. Upon every little Affront and Injury, Thoughts of Revenge are apt to riſe in our Hearts. We can bear very little with one another. We muſt have other Thoughts of the Patience, Forbearance, and Long-ſuffering of God. When the Diſciples would have called for Fire from Heaven upon the *Samaritans*, Luke IX. 54. Our Lord told them, *Ye know not what Spirit ye are of.* 'Tis not a Divine Spirit, 'tis not the Spirit of God; that appears being

ing ſo eaſily, and preſently provok'd. Tho' God be offended and affronted by the Wicked every day, and hath always Power to execute his Vengeance; yet he bears, with much Long-ſuffering and Patience, even the Veſſels of Wrath fitted for Deſtruction. His Thoughts are not as ours in this Reſpect: He hath reveal'd himſelf to be *ſlow to Anger*, and of great Long-ſuffering and Patience: Let us not Conclude, that he cannot, will not, bear with us; becauſe we cannot bear with one another.

Secondly, When we are injur'd and offended by Others, we are not eaſily reconcil'd; not ready to forgive, don't ſeek after Peace. Whereas the Bleſſed God, whom we deſpiſe, and provoke by multiply'd Crimes, he waits to be Gracious, and invites us to Return; beſeecheth us to be reconcil'd: He freely offers to forgive us, and aſſures us he will abundantly pardon. 'Tis true, the Divine Spirit, ſo far as it obtains, and is communicated to any, makes them eaſie to be entreated, forward to forgive, willing to be at peace with thoſe that have injur'd 'em, and not to return Evil, or refuſe Terms of Reconciliation. But ordinarily it is manifeſt, that our Temper, and Carriage to other Men, is quite Different. And we ſhould have very wrong Thoughts of God, if we apprehend him to be as unwilling to forgive us, as we often are to pardon thoſe that have offended us. Let

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us think of it with ſhame, as to thoſe that may have treſpaſs'd againſt us. What though they did begin the Quarrel, and gave us juſt Occaſion of Anger; what though they have been unthankful, and we have obliged them; and deſerv'd to be otherwiſe treated; Shall we yet retain Anger, let the Sun go down on our Wrath, and diſcover an implacable Spirit? How Different is this from the Divine Spirit? and how unlike are our Thoughts to God's Thoughts? You are not to think of God in this Particular, according to what you find in your ſelves.

Thirdly, Our Thoughts towards Others, who have injur'd us, are ſtraitned and limited. Poſſibly we may pardon once or twice, paſs by two or three Offences; but if the ſame Perſon treſpaſs again and again ſeveral times, we think he hath no Right to be forgiven, nor are we oblig'd to pardon him; even tho' he ſhould repent. But our Lord hath told us otherwiſe, *Mat.* XVIII. 21. that if we will be like our Heavenly Father, we muſt not only forgive *ſeven times*, but *ſeventy times ſeven.* We have but a little Pity, our Bowels are ſtraitned, we can pardon but a few Offences; but God doth abundantly pardon, and ſhow Mercy to a Thouſand Generations, and forgive Ten thouſand Sins. He hath *a multitude of Mercies*, Pſal. V. 7. *A multitude of Loving Kindneſſes*, Iſa. LXIII. 7. He is *Rich in Mercy*, and *Abundant*

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in Goodneſs. He can, and doth forgive, not only Sins before Repentance, but Backſlidings afterward. His Compaſſions do not fail, his Mercy endureth for ever; therefore we are not conſum'd. You muſt not meaſure God by your ſelves, nor his Thoughts by your Thoughts, in this Particular.

Fourthly, If we forgive thoſe that Injure us, we are backward to do them Good, to treat them with Kindneſs, and ſhew them Favour. It may be, we won't revenge our ſelves; we'll do them no Harm: But we avoid them, are ſhy toward them, we will not be kind to them: But God's Thoughts are not as ours in this Reſpect. He follows us Rebels, with continued Tokens of his Favour, loads us with his Benefits every day of our Lives; tho' we load him with our Sins. He heaps Coals of Fire upon our Heads; takes care of us, ſupports, ſupplies, provides for us; and is conſtantly kind to us, even while we affront him. And after he has forgiven us, he takes us to be his Friends, and Favourites, and Children. All the Mercies of thy paſt Life, all thy preſent Enjoyments are from him, againſt whom thou haſt ſinned. Thou haſt depended on his Providence ever ſince thou hadſt a Being, for daily Breath, and daily Bread. He ſaves thee from a thouſand Deaths and Dangers; thy Eſtate, thy Health, thy Credit, thy Liberty, thy Uſefulneſs, thy Comfort in Relations, and whatever good

thou hast, he gave thee: And he hath offer'd to give thee his Son, his Spirit, his Grace, his Glory, Himself to be thy All-sufficient Portion, and God in Covenant: And all this, while thou hast been in Rebellion against him; a Wretched Criminal against the Lord of thy Life, and the God of thy Mercies. O how unlike are God's Thoughts to ours in this Respect! Considering what our Thoughts are, to those who have injur'd and offended us.

II. *Secondly*, Consider your selves under Affliction and Suffering from the Hand of God; and how different God's Thoughts and yours are in that Respect also.

First, We presently conclude, that 'tis all from Anger and Wrath, whereas God says, *Whom he loves he chastens*; and that 'tis for our good, and that we are dealt with as Sons, and not as Bastards, *Heb.* XII. 5, 6. *Psal.* CXIX. 75.

Secondly, We are pettish and froward, peevish and perverse under the Rod of Affliction, while God's Thoughts are Thoughts of Peace toward us. When *For the Iniquity of his Covetousness I was wroth*, (because he had no Heart to do good with what I lent him, saith God concerning *Ephraim*) *and I smote him, he went on frowardly in the way of his own Heart: Nevertheless I have seen his ways, I will heal him, I will lead him, and restore Com-*

Comfort to him, Isa. LVII. 17, 18.

Thirdly, We often under Affliction take every hiding of God's Face, for an utter Rejection of us, whereas God hath no such Thoughts. He hath us still in his Eye, and bears us on his Heart, hath our Names graven on the Palmes of his Hand, loves us still, tho' he rebuke us; and will convince us of it by seasonable Comforts and Deliverance, *Jer.* XXXI. 18, 19, 20. *Is Ephraim my dear Son? I have heard him bemoaning himself,* (saith God) *thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a Bullock unaccustomed to the Yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.* Is he my dear Son, or rather is he not so? is he a pleasant Child, is he not so still to me? *For since I spake against him, I do remember him still; therefore my Bowels are turned for him, I will surely have Mercy upon him, saith the Lord.*

Fourthly, God's Thoughts are not as ours in respect of Affliction, as to the Continuance of the Rod. We are often ready to sink, and be dispirited and overwhelm'd in a Time of Darkness, as if it would never be Light: We are ready to give up all for lost, and conclude that God is gone for ever, and will be Merciful no more: Saying, *Our Bones are dryed up, our Hope is lost, we are cut off for our parts*, Ezek. XXXVII. 11. Whereas God's Thoughts are otherwise, he'll make those dry Bones live, and fetch them out of the Grave

of Affliction. *His Thoughts are Thoughts of Peace, to give us a Desired End*, Jer. XXIX. 11. How many have thought and said in their Despair, that God's Mercy was gone for ever; concerning whom he hath manifested, that his Thoughts are not as theirs.

Fifthly, God's Thoughts are not as ours, as to the End and Design, which he aims at in our Affliction. We think he intends not to refine, but ruine; not to purifie, but destroy. Whereas in Faithfulness he afflicts, where he knows we need it; to purge away our Dross, and take away our Tin; and to produce the Peaceable Fruits of Righteousness: *By this shall the Iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this shall be the fruit of all, to take away sin*, Isa. XXVII. 9. Do but wait a little, and you'll see, how you have been mistaken in your Apprehensions of God; and how his Thoughts have been unlike to yours.

II. Let us consider in the Second Place, that God's Thoughts are not only different from ours, but *Transcendently above them*; as far, and as high as the Heavens are above the Earth.

First, As to the *Kind* and *Nature* of them.

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First, His Thoughts of Grace and Kindness are of *an unsearchable Depth. O the Depth of the Riches of the Wisdom and the Knowledge of God!*

God! whoſe Ways (of Mercy as well as Judgment) *are unſearchable, and paſt our finding out*, Rom. XI. 33. There is a Depth in them, beyond the Line of Men and Angels to meaſure, *Pſal.* XCII. 5. *O Lord, how great are thy Works! and thy Thoughts are very deep.* In the Revelation of God's Grace and Mercy to Sinners by the Goſpel, we read of the *deep things of God*, ſuch as Eye hath not ſeen, nor Ear heard, neither hath it entred into the Heart of Man to conceive; 1 *Cor.* XI. 10. Such Depths that amaze the very Angels to look into, 1 *Pet.* I. 12.

Secondly, God's Thoughts of Love and Mercy are *Abſolute*, *Soveraign*, and *Independent*. 'Tis all after the Counſel of his own Will, and from the meer Good Pleaſure of his Will. This is the Source and Spring of all his Mercy and Forgiveneſs.

Thirdly, God's Thoughts of Mercy are *Faithful and Effectual*. All the Declarations of his Mercy ſhall be made good: All the Promiſes of Grace ſhall be fulfilled: All the Thoughts of his Love ſhall have their Effects. *O Lord, I will exalt thee, for thy Counſels of Old are Faithfulneſs and Truth*, Iſa. XXV. 1. All his Ways are Mercy and Truth, he keepeth Covenant and Mercy for ever, *Pſal.* LXXXIX. 28, 29. Tho' he viſit their Iniquities with the Rod, yet his Loving Kindneſs will he not take from them, nor ſuffer his Faithfulneſs to fail. Therfore,

Fourthly, It may be added, that God's Thoughts are *Unchangeable*, but ours are Variable: The Strength of *Israel* will not lye or repent. *He is not a Man, that he ſhould lye, nor the Son of Man, that he ſhould repent*, 1 Sam. XV. 29. The Mediator of the New Covenant lives for ever, to make Interceſſion for Sinners.

Fifthly, His Thoughts of Mercy are infinitely *Pure*, and infinitely *Righteous*. We ſhall never fully underſtand the infinite Righteouſneſs of God's Thoughts and Ways, 'till the Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God. He is Righteous in all his Counſels, and in all his Works; all his Ways are equal. *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee.* The Pſalmiſt tells us, that God will carry on his Thoughts of Mercy, and perfect his Grace, and make it thrive and grow: *To ſhow that he is upright, and there's no Unrighteouſneſs in him*, Pſal. XCII. *laſt*.

Secondly, God's Thoughts of Grace and Mercy are tranſcendently above ours, *in the Way and Manner of his diſpenſing his Grace and Mercy*. The Diſpenſation of his Love and Grace to Sinners, is that which paſſeth Knowledge, as to the Manner of it: And when this Love is ſhed abroad in the Heart, there is a Peace reſulting from it, which is better felt than expreſt. Something may be conceived and ſpoken, but there's a great deal, which is above the reach of Words, for we

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have no Line to meaſure it by, no Scale in all the World to weigh it in: We have nothing to compare it unto, but falls unſpeakably ſhort. No Kindneſs, no Love, no Charity or Affection of one Creature to another, by which we can ſet it forth. The neareſt and deareſt among Men, is as much below this, as Earth is below Heaven. The Riches of his Grace in Chriſt to Sinners, 'tis call'd *the unſearchable Riches of Chriſt.* How admirable are the Dimenſions of Divine Grace and Love, mention'd by the Apoſtle, *Eph.* III. 19. where he ſpeaks of the *Length, Breadth, Heigth* and *Depth of the Love of God in Chriſt*, which paſſeth Knowledge.

Firſt, It's *Breadth*, reaching unto *Jew* and *Gentile*, Circumciſion and Uncircumciſion, *Barbarian, Scythian*, Bond and Free, Poor and Rich. The Vileſt and Chiefeſt of Sinners are not exempted: Mercy is extended to all ſorts of Perſons and Caſes. 'Tis Grace and Love, wider than all our Neceſſities and Miſeries, Sins and Wants.

Secondly, The *Length* of it, from Everlaſting to Everlaſting; reaching to Sinners that were at the greateſt Diſtance; bringing thoſe nigh that are afar off, and calling thoſe home who are wandering and gone off; ſo as one might have thought, they ſhould never return.

Thirdly, The *Depth* of that Love and Grace is unſearchable. Unleſs we underſtood the

Depth of that Misery and Ruine, into which we were sunk by our Rebellion against God, and are deliver'd from, by his pardoning Mercy; unless we understood the Horror of that Hell of Wrath, which our Sins deserve; and the Extremity of those Agonies and Torments, which our Blessed Redeemer underwent, for our Deliverance; unless we knew the Power of God's Wrath, and the Intollerable, Endless Misery of lost Souls, we cannot fully understand the Depth of this Love.

Fourthly, The *Height* of it is also unsearchable. 'Tis as high as Heaven, to which it will bring us: And beyond our reach to understand, unless we knew the infinite Blessedness of the Heavenly Glory, which it cannot now enter into our Hearts to conceive; as well as the Infinite Misery of Condemned Sinners in the Bottomless Pit. We can no more tell the Height, than the Depth, of this Grace of God in thus pardoning Sinners.

But to help you a little to some more distinct Considerations of this, let me name a few Things.

First, That none doth or can so *freely* pardon and forgive, as God doth. *Secondly*, None so *continually*. *Thirdly*, So *fully*. *Fourthly*, So *indifferently*, and *without respect of Persons*. *Fifthly*, None so *tenderly* and *affectionately*, and with such Bowels of Compassion, and Tender Kindness, as God doth.

First,

First, *None so freely:* If we are brought to forgive those that have wrong'd us, 'tis commonly on the Entreaty and Intercession of some Friends, who have Interest in us, and Power over us; and this after great Submissions of the Offender. So that 'tis rather from some External Motives and Inducements, than from our own Kind and Generous Inclinations: But 'tis otherwise when we are pardon'd by God, *Isa.* XLIII. 23. *I am he that blotteth out thy Transgressions, for my own sake, I'le not remember thy Sins any more,* Hos. XIV. 4. I will heal their Backslidings, *and love them freely.* Nothing of our Prayers and Tears, Submissions and Humiliations, nothing we can do or suffer, can make the least Compensation to the Justice of God, for the Contempt and Dishonour we have cast on him by Sin. There's nothing but the Free-Grace of God in Christ, to be ey'd, to be pleaded, to be trusted to, and depended upon. In this Case, there is no Difference between such as are forgiven, and such as are left under Damning Guilt, but what is made by the Free-Grace of God.

Secondly, *None so continually.* He encourages and commands us to beg daily Forgiveness, as well as daily Bread: He renews his pardoning Mercy every Day, and every Hour. We soon come to the End of our Pity, and are quickly tyr'd in forgiving Injuries against our selves. But while we live, we shall stand in need of Forgiveness from God. And this is

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our Comfort, that if we ſin, we have an Advocate with the Father, who maketh continual Interceſſion for us; and ſo we hope for continual, daily, renewed Pardon.

Thirdly, None doth or can pardon ſo *compleatly* and *fully*. He blotteth out our Tranſgreſſions, ſo as to remember them no more; he caſts them behind his Back, throws them into the Depths of the Sea. Many other Bleſſings he beſtows, and lends us for a time, and then calls for them again; but this Forgiveneſs of Sin, is one of thoſe Mercies that are Irrevocable, and without Repentance. We may be without the Knowledge of an Intereſt in his pardoning Mercy, we may loſe the Senſe of it, and forfeit the Comfort of it; but if we are reconciled to God, united to Chriſt, and brought under the Bond of the Everlaſting Covenant; tho' he may chaſten us as a Father, and viſit our Iniquities with Stripes, he will not diſinherit us, or caſt us out of his Family: His Covenant Favour and Kindneſs ſhall never depart, his Covenant of Peace ſhall never be removed, *Iſa.* LIV. 9. This is as the Waters of *Noah*, which ſhall never return to overflow the Earth. Fatherly Love may be angry, but will not turn to Hatred.

Fourthly, None doth or can pardon ſo *Indifferently, without reſpect of Perſons.* Not only leſſer Sinners who repent, but the Vileſt; not only of ſuch a Nation, but of any Nation; not only ſuch as have ſinned thus long, unto

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ſuch a Degree; but if beyond all ordinary Bounds and Meaſures. Let the Wickedneſs, and Unrighteouſneſs, Vileneſs, and Filthineſs, and Aggravations of Sin be what they will, if you return to God by Chriſt, he will abundantly pardon. This ſhould magnifie the Riches of his Grace to ſome of you, who are intereſted in this Forgiveneſs. "*Lord*, How "is it that my Sins are pardon'd, when others "(not greater Sinners than I) have dyed in "their Sins, and are undone for ever! How is "it that I am pardon'd, and others that have "not been ſo Vile, ſhall never be forgiven! "How is it that I have been forgiven, and "Others that were my Companions in Sin, "were left to Impenitence and Hardneſs "of Heart! That many of better Parts, of "more Wit, of more Learning, of larger Ca-"pacities, and bettter accompliſhd'd for Uſe-"fulneſs and Service, are left to go on in "Sin, to their own Deſtruction; and thy Grace "has open'd my Eyes, and ſoften'd my Heart, "and made me ſenſible of Sin, and ſo to va-"lue a Redeemer, to ſeek him, receive him, "accept him, *&c.*

Fifthly, None *with ſuch Tenderneſs and Compaſſion.* All the Bowels of Parents are Stone and Adamant, in compariſon with his. We read of his Delighting in Mercy, and of his Tender Mercies, and Loving Kindneſſes; of his *Rejoycing over us to do us good, with his whole Heart, and whole Soul*, Jer. XXXII. 41. Good-

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ness and Love is his very Nature, for *God is Love.* He pities us more, than any, the most Tender Parent, ever did a Miserable Child. *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth Iniquity, Transgression and Sin; and passeth by the Transgression of his Remnant, because he delighteth in Mercy?* Micah VII. 19.

All the *Application* I shall make of this shall be, to endeavour to bring it home to the Case of particular Persons, in Answer to some Objections. For Instance,

Object. 1. Some may be ready to say notwithstanding all this, "I have such a sight "of my own past Crimes, and their Aggra- "vations, that none can judge of my Case as "I can, or know the worst of it as I do. I "knew the Will of God, and yet disobey'd "him: I have sinn'd, when I knew God did "forbid it, and threaten'd with Eternal "Death what I was doing: I have hearkned "to Temptation, tho' I had vow'd, and pro- "mis'd, and resolv'd, and engag'd against "that very Sin I was tempted to. And which "was worse, I had some Thoughts of God's "seeing me, some Apprehensions that he "would judge me for it; and yet I went on "and sinned: Surely God will never forgive "me. If any of my Fellow Creatures had "wilfully, deliberately, ungratefully, frequent- "ly, and perfidiously, despised and affronted, "injured and offended me; I that am but a "Worm,

"Worm, could have no Patience with ſuch "a One: Much more may the Bleſſed God "reſent, remember, and puniſh ſuch Vile Ini-"quities as I have been guilty of.

Anſw. Conſider in Anſwer to this, how high the Heavens are above the Earth, and (which is more) the difference between the Creature and the Creator: That his Thoughts are not as ours; not like our miſgiving, deſpairing Thoughts. He doth and will pardon *like himſelf*, like *a God*: Not after the Meaſures of a finite, paſſionate, weak Man. All that you have ſaid, or can ſay, ſhall be no Impediment, if you return to God, and ſeek him in Chriſt for Forgiveneſs. He will *Abundantly pardon*, beyond what you are able to think, or ſuppoſe in the like Caſe. God complains of *Iſrael*, as prone and enclin'd to backſlide, yet he cannot find in his Heart to deſtroy 'em, but expreſſes a kind of Conflict between Juſtice and Mercy; and at laſt reſolves, *I am God, and not Man*, therfore I will not execute the Fierceneſs of mine Anger, *but I will cauſe 'em to walk after the Lord*, Hoſea XI. 7, 10.

He doth all things *like himſelf*, (as one Obſerves). If he build, he makes a World: If he be angry with the World, he ſends a Flood over the Face of all the Earth. If he goes out with the Armies of his People, he makes the Sun ſtand ſtill, the Stars to fight, the Seas to ſwallow up the moſt dreadful Armadoes,

madoes. If he love, the precious Hearts Blood of his Beloved Son is not too dear: If any become his Friend and Favourite thro' the Mediation of Christ, he will make him a King, give him a Paradise, and set a Crown of Eternal Glory on his Head. Let us not consider so much what is fit or likely for us to receive, as for so Great a God to give and bestow. If we are contrite, humble, penitent, and fly to Jesus Christ as our Refuge of Hope: He will think all the meritorious Sufferings of his Son, all the Promises in his Book, all the Comforts of his Holy Spirit, all the Pleasures and Blessedness of his Kingdom, little enough for us.

Object. 2. But some will say further, "I did "once hope, that God had given me true Re-"pentance, and unfeigned Faith; and that I "was hearty and sincere in my Covenant "with God: I had some good Hopes, that I "was reconcil'd, and that I was accepted: "And I seal'd my Covenant, and set my Name "to it, and renew'd it also at the Lord's Table. "And I thank God, I had some Quickning and "Comfort, as I thought, but Wretch as I am, "I have revolted since. I have burst those "Bonds asunder, I have gone back with such "abominable Backslidings, that I can't think "God will ever pardon me; who after I have "known the Way of Righteousness, have "turn'd from the Holy Commandment. Af-

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"ter having been waſh'd, I have return'd "with the Dog to his Vomit, and the Swine "to her wallowing in the Mire. I fear I am "among thoſe who draw back to Perdition, "of whom God may ſay, that his Soul ſhall "have no Pleaſure in them.

Anſw. Conſider that God's Thoughts are not as yours, as to Returning Backſliders. He calls you to return; *O Iſrael, thou haſt fallen by thine Iniquity, return unto the Lord thy God.* He tells you, his Grace and Mercy can outdo all that you can think. If you never heard of any, that have ſinn'd as you have, or with ſuch aggravated Backſlidings; he may yet forgive thee. *Though your Sins be as Scarlet, they ſhall be white as Snow, tho' red like Crimſon, they ſhall be as Wool,* Iſa. I. 18. If he give you Grace to repent and return, he will forgive. Sins after Baptiſm, Sins after unworthy receiving the Lord's Supper, may be pardon'd. There is a Fountain open'd, there is a Ranſom found, there is a Propitiation made, there's an Advocate with the Father. You muſt forgive an offending Brother if he repent, even unto ſeventy times ſeven. And will not God forgive Returning Backſliders, and multiply Forgiveneſſes? This Text is the moſt proper Scripture that can be, for ſuch to conſider; that they may not think, that no Mercy ſhall be extended to them. They are invited to return, with a Promiſe that *God will heal their Backſlidings,* Hoſ. XIV. 3, 4. Jer. III. *beginning.*; and

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afterward, *Verse* the 21*st*. *Go and proclaim these Words, saying, return ye backsliding Israel, (saith the Lord) and I will not cause my Anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, (saith the Lord) and will not keep Anger for ever.* You ought therfore, to add the following Words; *Behold we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God.* Return to him with all your Hearts, he will receive you graciously, and love you freely. *The Prodigal* is entertain'd upon his Return, more than the First-born, assoon as he repents, and saith, *I am unworthy to be called thy Son.* He will heal your Backslidings, and *take away all Iniquity*; the Guilt, the Stain, the Power, the Punishment, and the Anguish of Conscience. He will not impute thy Sin, he will purge thy Conscience from dead works, and enable thee to serve and obey him. The Sun of Righteousness shall arise on thee with healing in his Wings; the Influence of his Holy Spirit shall by Grace and Comfort be restored to thee. And all this from his Free Love and Mercy. Nothing is too hard for Love, Divine Love.

It is, I confess, a real Difficulty, when one is made sensible of great Sins after *Repentance*, and I know of no Relief like that, which is offer'd from this Scripture. I am unworthy, may such a Soul say, *but the Lord is Gracious.* I have misimprov'd his Mercy, and abus'd his Goodness, and his Patience; what shall relieve me in this Case? Why *his Infinite Love, Condescension and Grace.* Well, but I have revolted and gone back

back, by many aggravated Back-slidings, stare me in the Face: Yet *God is Unchangeable*, he's not only Merciful but *Faithful to his Covenant*: And his Faithfulness was never engaged to the Angels that fell. But here's the great Objection, that will be made to all this. This is true, but *I am unfaithful*, and the Unfaithfulness of one Party, in all Covenants, disobliges the other Party. In Answer to this, I say, *He's God, and not Man.* His Thoughts are not as ours. Among Men, in all Covenants this is true, but God's Thoughts and Ways are *above ours.* Therfore if I yet return, and take hold of his Covenant; I may argue I am within the Bond of it, and he will not utterly cast me off, but forgive me upon Repentance. I have read of one in Despair, whom the Devil perswaded it was in vain to pray to God, or serve him, for he must perish; he should be damned, and go to Hell when he dy'd; who yet went to Prayer, and begg'd of God, that if he must go to Hell when he dyed, yet that it would please him, to let him serve him while he liv'd: Upon which his Terrors vanish'd, being clearly convinc'd none could pray that Prayer, or make such a Request, who was guilty of the Unpardonable Sin, or had sinn'd *the Sin against the Holy Ghost.*

Object. 3. Some may say further, "But I "have had many Fears, and some Hopes for

"a time; and I thought I was in Favour with "God, and had an Intereſt in this Forgive- "neis. But I have often heard it, (and I "believe it) that God never pardons Sin, "where he doth not *ſubdue* it. Juſtification "and Sanctification go together: If the Guilt "of Sin be forgiven, the Power of it is broken. "But I find Corruption is ſtrong, evil Incli- "nations are ſtill ſtirring and raging. I ne- "ver Imagin'd, there was ſuch a Hell of Wic- "kedneſs in my Heart, as I now find. There's "ſo much Impurity, Carnality, Pride, World- "lineſs, *&c.* yet remaining in my Soul, that "I can't think my Sins are forgiven, and that "God will abundantly pardon me, or hath "done it; becauſe Sin is not mortified and "ſubdued.

Anſw. God's Thoughts and yours are very different in this Matter. For he attains Wiſe and Holy Ends, by ſuffering us to feel Corruption, and obliging us to continual Conflicts with it; by ſanctifying us gradually, and not all at once; by letting us ſee and feel more of Corruption ſtirring, and ſtriving, after Converſion, than ever we knew before. Hereby he ingages us in conſtant Warfare all our days; and makes it needful, that we may apply to Chriſt continually, as the great Phyſitian of Souls. And I beſeech you, remember and believe this, That *No Sin, no Corruption that is your Burden, that you would rather be rid of than keep, ſhall ever be damning*

ing to you. It may be a Sign of more Grace that you ſenſibly complain of Corruption more than formerly: *If you faithfully oppoſe it,* 'tis an Evidence your Hearts are ſofter, Conſcience more tender, and you underſtand the Holy Law of God better.

Object. 4. But after all, ſome will ſay, "All "this is good News to ſeveral, but not to "me. I have nothing of the Spirit of Life "and Power, that accompanies Forgiveneſs, "I am dead in all my Duties, I can't pray, "I have no ſuch Liberty, and Freedom, and "Livelineſs in Prayer, as others have. I "come to the Lord's-Table, but I have no "ſuch Sealing, no ſuch Comfort, no ſuch "Aſſurance, no ſuch Joy, no ſuch Foretaſts "of Heaven, as I believe others have. I "keep on in a round of Duty, but 'tis not "with me, as with the Living Members of "Chriſt. Therfore I can't apply all this to "my ſelf with Comfort.

Anſw. God's Thoughts are not as yours in this Matter. You object, that you can't pray with ſuch Life and Enlargement as others, and as formerly: But is it not your Burden? Are you not diſſatisfied with your ſelves about it? Do you not beg the Spirit of Prayer, and to have this ill Frame cur'd? Do you not look up to Heaven with daily Sighs and Groans? and beg Relief from Chriſt, as weary and heavy laden under this Indiſpoſition?

Let Conſcience in the firſt place be faithful: Is there not ſome great Guilt lately contracted? ſome Sin you have not repented of, whereby you have griev'd the Holy Spirit of Chriſt, and this ſtops your Mouths in Prayer, and ſhames your Faces? Or, have you not reſted too much in the Outward Performance of Duty, and Attendance on the Ordinances of the Goſpel? You come to the Table of the Lord, look upon it, it may be, as a Charm, (as too many make it on a Death-bed) you expect it ſhall work like Phyſick, in a Natural, not in a Moral Way: And by meer Coming, (whatever you have been, or done before, or however negligent you have been in your Preparatory Work,) you expect that it ſhould be all one with you. If you can charge your ſelves with any thing of this, you muſt renew your Repentance.

If Conſcience doth not accuſe you in this Matter; Conſider, God's Thoughts are not as yours. He knows what is from the Weakneſs of the Fleſh, and what from the Willfulneſs of the Spirit. He knows what Deadneſs and Diſtraction may ariſe from the Infirmity of the Body, and what is the Sin of the Soul.

If upon all theſe Accounts, you loſe the Evidence of your Acceptance with God, and fear the worſt: Yet when a Man hath loſt his Acquittance for a Debt paid, 'tis a Comfort to him to conſider, that the Man he deals with

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is a merciful, good Man, tho' he cannot find his Discharge. God is infinitely Gracious, and is ready to restore what you complain you have lost. It was *David*'s Case, *Psalm* 51. Yea, if thou feareſt thy Grace was never true, thy Heart never right with God, thy State never good; there is Mercy enough in God to pardon all thy *former* Hypocrisies: If *now* thou return, and seek him with thy whole Heart. There are Promises of Grace in such a Case to be pleaded, that God will give an Heart of Flesh, give a Spirit of Mourning, put his Fear within thee, and cause thee to walk in his Statutes. Therfore do not fruitlesly bemoan thy self, and sit down in Despondency, but consult the Word of God, and seek to the Throne of Grace with Hope, whatever thy Objections and Temptations be. Whatever you do, take heed of dishonourable Thoughts of the Grace and Mercy of God, and of the Security he hath given to perform every Word of Promise, wherein he hath commanded us to hope.

To Conclude, Since we are so near the End of this Year, and many design and hope to renew their Covenant the next Lord's-day at his Table, I beg you to consider, and remember it for your Encouragement; that *God's Thoughts are not as yours.* Whatever Sins you have been guilty of the last Year; whatever you can charge your selves with, as

Unworthy Receiving the *Lord's Supper* for the time past; yet if *now* you will seriously Examine your selves, and humble your Souls, and return to the Lord, and apply to Christ, and stir up your selves, to be dispos'd as Penitent Believers, to renew your Covenant-Vow and Engagement to be the Lord's, *this next time*, he will forgive the Sins of all your *former Sacraments*; all the Sins of *the last Year*, and of *your past Lives*; and Seal to you the Forgiveness of all Sin, through the Blood of Jesus. You need not, you ought not to doubt it, for, *As high as the Heavens are above the Earth, so are God's Thoughts of Mercy above ours, and his Ways above ours.*

THE

THE

Fifth Sermon.

ISAIAH, LV. 8, 9.

For My Thoughts are not your Thoughts, neither are your Ways, My Ways, ſaith the Lord.

For as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, ſo are My Ways higher than your Ways, and My Thoughts than your Thoughts.

THE Diſparity between the Thoughts and Ways of God, and Ours here mention'd, hath ſpecial Refer[ence] to the Diſpenſation of his [Grace] and Mercy, in Pardoning the World of Sinners, who forſake their Evil Ways, and return to God, by unfeigned Repentance: But in this Diſcourſe, I Deſign to Conſider the Words in a larger and more General Sen[ſe]

and ſhow, that *The Ways of God are not as Ours, but as far above 'em, as Heaven is above the Earth.*

By the Ways of God we may either underſtand, *Firſt*, Thoſe he would direct us to Walk in; what he would have us to Believe, and Do. Or, *Secondly*, His Ways and Works towards us, in the Conduct and Management of Things by his Providence. In the Firſt Senſe we read of the *Way of Truth*, the *Way of his Commandments*; and of walking in *the Way of the Lord*, &c. that is, receiving as true, the Doctrines he hath Revealed, and Obſerving the Orders, and Obeying the Commands which he hath given us. In the latter Senſe, by *the Ways of God*, I Mean, his *Works of Providence*, according to his Word. In both theſe, in the Declarations of his Word, as to what we are to Believe, and Do; and in the Works of his Providence, what he doth with us, there are many things *far above us*. His Ways are not as Ours, as to Either.

BOTH may here be very well Comprehended. The *Revelations* of the Will of God by his Word, as to *Faith*, *Worſhip* and *Practice*: And alſo his *Providences*, and Dealings with the Children of Men, according to Scripture Revelation. *Our Ways* are not *as His*, to Either. There is a vaſt *Diſparity* between them. In this Senſe, His Ways are very unlike to Ours, and tranſcendently above them; both as to Matters of *Revelation* and *Providence*.

I. *Firſt*

I. *First*, In what Senſe are God's Ways not like Ours, but vaſtly Different?

1. THEY are *Different* as to the Nature of 'em. All his Ways and Works are *Perfect*; done with Infinite Wiſdom and Judgment: And therfore when *Moſes* publiſhes the Name of God, he begins with this, *Deut.* XXXI. 4. *He is a Rock, His Work is perfect, all his Ways are Judgment:* They are the Fruit of Infinite, Unerring Councel. But what Weakneſs and Imperfection, what Defect and Folly do we diſcover in our Ways? All his Ways are *Righteous* and *Holy*, Pſal. CXLV. 17. *He is Holy in all his Ways, and Righteous in all his Works.* But what Impurity and Obliquity is there in ours? All His Ways are Juſt and Equal; He Challengeth all the World to prove the Contrary, in any one Particular: What doth he require of us, but in the ſtricteſt Juſtice is Due? whereas, how Unequal is our Carriage towards Him, and one another? There is an Admirable Harmony, and Agreement in the Ways of God, as to all the parts of them, connected one with another: His Word is conſtant and abiding, ſteddy and conſiſtent, not *Yea and Nay*; 2 Cor. I. 19, 20. *All his Promiſes are Yea and Amen. The Strength of Iſrael is not a Man, that he ſhould lye; nor the Son of Man, that he ſhould repent:* But we are Mutable, and often croſs and contradict our Selves in our Ways: And the Beſt Men

do

to too often discover this Inconstancy in Principle and Practice.

2. THERE is a further *Difference* between the Ways of God and Ours, in the Methods and Means used and taken, and the Manner of his Proceeding, to effect an End. His Way is to make *Weak things confound the Mighty, and things base and despised, and which are not, to bring to Nought things that are*, 1 Cor. I. 27. We cannot do so. God would not use the Wisdom and Power of the World for the spreading of the Gospel; but by the Foolishness of Preaching it pleased God to bring Men to believe, and make the Doctrine of the Cross of Christ, the Power of God to their Eternal Salvation. The Instrument he employ'd, and the Methods he used, to give Success to the Gospel, did plainly evidence this.

AND that Instance may serve instead of many other: Was it not an unlikely Attempt, for a few Mean and Obscure Persons, such as Publicans and Fisher-men, and Tent-makers, without the Improvements of Education, or the Advantages of Learning, Eloquence, Experience and Conversation in the World; without the Assistance of Civil Power and Authority, or any Considerable Interest and Reputation, to require all Mankind to believe in one *Jesus*, whom they own was Crucified, that he was alive, and was Lord and King, and must be receiv'd and obeyed as *the Christ of God*. To

tell

tell all the World, that all the eſtabliſh'd Religion and Religion of their ſeveral Countries, muſt be laid aſide, and their wicked Cuſtoms and Courſes forſaken, and this new Religion of *Jeſus* be embrac'd, that requires the Belief and Practice of ſo many things they muſt need account very hard, conſidering the Prejudices and the Luſts of Men. Could they hope that Kingdoms and Empires, Schools and Univerſities, would eaſily ſubmit to this Change? that they ſhould be too hard for the Devil, and all the Powers of Darkneſs, by preaching the Doctrine of a Crucified Saviour?

And yet in the Space of about thirty Years, this new Doctrine and Religion was not only diffuſed thro' the greateſt part of the *Roman* Empire, but had reach'd as far as *Parthia* and *India*: Even before the Deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, as our Lord foretold, *Mat.* XXIV. 14. *This Goſpel of the Kingdom ſhall be preached in all the World, for a witneſs unto all Nations, and then ſhall the End come.* This Succeſs was repreſented by an *Angel flying thro' the midſt of Heaven, and preaching the Everlaſting Goſpel to every Nation, and Kindred, and Tongue, and People*, Rev. XIV. 6.

And this was done without Force of Arms, and againſt all Oppoſition imaginable: Their Meſſage was entertain'd, their Doctrine credited, and Chriſt believed on in the World. Many thouſands were converted preſently, and many more afterward: Tho' the Meſſengers

employed

employed could not be sure of Success, any further than certain of the Truth of their Doctrine, and of the Divine Presence and Power to accompany them. But they might be almost sure of enduring Torments, and losing their Lives for publishing such a Doctrine, and persisting in it, in the manner they did. But the Wisdom of God, and the Power of God is glorified, in succeeding such Weak Instruments to such Excellent Purposes.

IN all the Methods of his Providence we find, that *by weak things he confounds the Mighty, and by Foolish things*, (as the World accounts 'em,) *confounds the Wise*. There are Instances of it in the History of *Moses*, as to the Plagues of *Egypt*: But it was more manifest in the whole Frame of *Christianity*, and in the Success and Prevalency of it. He defeated *the Devil's* Design, and overturn'd his Empire by such Means, as could never be supposed by Reason to do it. By the Seed of the Woman, whom he had seduc'd, by the Son of God in our Flesh, suffering and dying for us, *He* wrested the Victory out of Satan's Hands, by humbling himself to the Death of the Cross; and so by dying, destroyed him that had the Power Death.

THERE are other Instances might be given, as where God *strengthens the spoyled against the strong, He brings down those that dwell on high, the lofty City he layeth it low: He layeth it low even to the ground, he bringeth it even to the dust: The Feet shall tread it down, even the Feet of the Poor,*

Poor, and the Steps of the Needy, Iſa. 26. 6. *The Stone cut out out of the Mountain without hands, ſhall daſh in pieces great Mountains*, all the four great Monarchies of the World, *and fill the whole Earth*.

HIS Ways are not as ours, in that he often prefers *the Younger* before *the Elder*, and gives them the Precedency and Principal Bleſſing. *Abel* was preferr'd before *Cain*, and his Offering accepted. *Abraham* the Younger, choſen to be God's Favourite, before his Elder Brethren. *Jacob* before *Eſau*, and *He* preferr'd *Ephraim* before *Manaſſeh*, the Elder Son of *Joſeph*. So it is obſerved by the Spirit of God, of *Noah*'s Children, *Shem* is preferr'd, and called the Brother of *Japhet* the Elder, *Gen.* 10. 21. And *David*, the Youngeſt Son of *Jeſſe*, is choſen to be King, and the Man after God's own Heart. To manifeſt the Freedom of his Counſels, and the Soveraignty of his Grace and Providence; *Was not Eſau Jacob's Brother, yet Jacob have I loved?*

3. HIS Ways and *Ours* differ alſo in this, that he is never fruſtrated or diſappointed in his Work, as to what he deſigns. *He brings the Counſels of Men to nought, and the Devices of the People to none Effect, but the Counſel of the Lord ſhall ſtand*, Pſalm XXXIII. 10, 11. *He ſpeaks the word, and it ſhall ſtand: He confirms the Word of his Servants, and performs the Counſel of his Meſſengers, ſaying to Jeruſalem, be thou inhabited, and to the Cities of Judah, ye ſhall be built*; that

saith to the Deep be dry, and I will dry up thy Rivers: He saith of Cyrus, *he is my Shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying to* Jerusalem, *thou shalt be built, and to the Temple, thy Foundation shall be laid,* Isa. XLIV. *latter end.* Our Ways are not like his, he will always overcome when he judgeth: He will fulfill all his Pleasure, and accomplish all that is in his Heart, which we cannot pretend to do.

II. *Secondly,* GOD's *Ways not only differ from ours, but do Transcendently exceed 'em,* are infinitely above them, *as high as the Heavens are above the Earth:* There is an unsearchable Depth in the Ways of God, which we are call'd to adore, but cannot comprehend. We may cry out with the Apostle, *O the Depth, both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his Judgments, and his Ways past finding out!* Rom. XI. *His Judgments are a great Depth,* Psal. XXXVI. 7. *He is wonderful in Counsel, and excellent in Working. His Wisdom is unsearchable, and his Ways past finding out:* Job V. 9. *Chap.* IX. 10. There are many things in *Divine Revelation* and *Providence,* that transcend our Reach: If we will not allow this, but must have a particular Reason for all that God speaks and doth, before we will believe it; What's this, but to make his Wisdom *finite* like *ours*; or ours *Infinite* like *His!* On this Account, the great Masters of Philosophy in former

former Ages, were the worſt Enemies to the Goſpel of Chriſt; becauſe the *Apoſtles* nakedly repreſented their Doctrines without that Wiſdom, or Demonſtration from Natural Principles, which *they* uſed, and therfore *the Goſpel* was *Fooliſhneſs* to them.

'TIS the not owning God's Ways to be above ours, but making our Reaſon the Supream Judge concerning Doctrines ſupernaturally revealed, which is the Spring of the many Errors and Blaſphemies that abound among us at this Day. Whereas we may as well meaſure the Juſtice or Injuſtice of the Providential Works of God, by our Will and Choice: Whether what he doth be Juſt and Good, or not, becauſe 'tis what we like, or do not like; as by our finite Minds comprehend, whether that *can be true*, which in a Divine Revelation is delivered as a true Doctrine. We can no more conceive the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in ſome Events of Providence, than his Veracity in ſome Truths revealed. More particularly,

Firſt, As to *Scripture Revelation*, what we are to believe. Let's conſider that *God's Ways and Thoughts are Above ours*: And what is therein aſſerted, we muſt receive and credit upon the Authority of a Divine Teſtimony, tho' the Doctrine there laid down, may be ſuch as hath no Foundation in Nature; that is, it could not be known but by Divine Revelation. 'Tis a ſufficient Reaſon for us to

believe

believe the Doctrine, because we find it in the Holy Scripture; and we have Reason to acquiesce therein, because the Revelation, that is contain'd in this Book, we have Ground to believe, is from GOD; and so infallibly true. If we will own our Baptism, and take CHRIST for our Teacher, we must receive the Truth of what HE hath revealed upon a *Divine Testimony*; tho' we cann't comprehend how such a Christian Doctrine may be reconcil'd to our common Notions of things in other Cases.

I grant, the Doctrine of the *Holy Trinity*, for Instance, carries a very great Difficulty in it, and is more oppos'd, as *Incredible*, and *Unintelligible*, than other Principles of Christian Religion: But this being *Reveal'd from Heaven*, as we affirm, and make an Article of our Faith, if we find it contain'd in the Holy Scriptures, God's Ways being so far above ours, will do much to answer the Objection of its being *Incomprehensible*.

IF GOD be INCOMPREHENSIBLE, why should any thing he's pleas'd to say, seem *Incredible* to us? Where he has interpos'd by his Definitive Sentence, our Reason must submit, and has no Right to debate the Matter, but ought to approve what God speaks, and subscribe to whatever he writes. The Testimony of God, whatever Exceptions our Reason can make, should convince our Judgment, and doth oblige our Faith. Is not His Veracity a firm and sure Foundation for us to relye upon, without

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the concurrent Teſtimony of Reaſon? Shall we not believe Infinite Wiſdom, and Truth upon his own Word, unleſs what he ſaith be in it ſelf Credible, and ſo may be believed, without his Teſtimony? The more we conſider what God is, the more eaſily ſhall we be perſwaded, that he is equally to be believed, when he affirms what we *cannot underſtand to be true*, as when he declares that, which by the common Principles of our Reaſon we know *is ſo*. If we own a Divine Revelation, we can no more Doubt of the one then the other; unleſs a Divine Teſtimony muſt receive its force from the Evidence of our Reaſon. Which is to deſtroy all the Teſtimony of Divine Revelation in Supernatural Truths; where the Evidence of Reaſon fails. What! tho' we cannot give an Account, how it is or can be ſo as we find it in the Scripture, is any thing that God ſays the leſs Credible upon that Account? 'Tis the higheſt Reaſon to believe every thing that God hath ſaid: His Authority hath Strength ſufficient to ſecure my *Faith* againſt all ſuch Objections, as ariſe only from Ignorance, and want of Principles to Judge by, or from the Incomprehenſibleneſs of the Object.

IT ſeems plainly the Deſign of the Apoſtle, 1 *Cor.* II. Chap. to obviate the great Objection, that is now brought by *Infidels* and *Socinians*, *by granting it* to be true, That what we are taught to beleive by the Goſpel is Inconceivable, and above the Reach of Humane Reaſon: That

many Doctrines of the Gospel are such as could neither be discovered, nor when they were, could be received, and applauded by the Rational Part of Mankind. It was *not the Wisdom of Men, nor of this World, but the Wisdom of God*, 5th and 6th Verses: The Apostle did not go about to perswade the World of the Truth of them, in such a Manner, as the Wise Men among the *Gentiles* made use of, to perswade the People of their Opinions. But the Gospel being a Divine Revelation, they endeavoured to prove the Truth of it, *by the Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power*; i. e. by Supernatural Proofs from Ancient Prophecies, by uncontested Miracles, and such like Testimonies of God's owning the Gospel to be a Revelation from him. So that *their Faith did not stand in the Wisdom* of Men but *in the Power of God*. And therefore we should not be stumbled, nor think Strange, if Matters of Divine Revelation should be inconceivable by meer Reason.

THE let's them know, that even this was foretold by the Prophets, *Verse* 19. *for it is written by the Prophet, Eye hath not seen nor Ear heard, neither hath it entred into the Heart of Man*, &c. *But God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit*, by which Spirit, Christ and his Apostles made known this Doctrine. And it follows, *The Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God*: And therefore tho' the Things be such as we never thought of before, and we cannot well conceive, when they are told us, yet

yet that is no such Wonder; for the Nature of our own Souls cannot be conceiv'd by any Inferior Being; nor our secret Thoughts known by any other of our Fellow-Creatures. *Ver.* 11. *For what Man knoweth the Things of a Man, but the Spirit of Man within him; and so the things of God knoweth no Man, but the Spirit of God.* As we cannot know the secret Purposes of other Men, 'till they themselves discover them; so the Councils of God concerning our Salvation, which depend meerly upon his own Will, none can know, but the Spirit of God; and by some Revelation from that Spirit, and not by Natural Reason. *For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*; i. e. is acquainted with all his secret Counsels.

THE great Question therefore will be, Whether the Revelation that contains such and such incredible Doctrines be Divine. And accordingly the Apostle adds in the next Verse, that he built *his Faith*, not upon the Philosophy or Inventions of Men; but upon the Revelation which God hath made. *We have not received the Spirit of the World, but the Spirit which is of God; that we may know the things that are freely given us of God.* These Things could never else have been known, and therefore it should not offend any, that we do not endeavour to prove these Doctrines by Philosophical Arguments: But by such as are proper to prove them by, *viz.* from Di-

Divine Revelation. Which things alſo we ſpeak, not in the Words which Man's Wiſdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghoſt teacheth, comparing ſpiritual things with ſpiritual: That is, the Revelations of the Old Teſtament with thoſe of the New. And after all he he tells us in the 14th. Verſe, That *the Natural Man*, (who will believe nothing but according to his own preconceived Notions from Natural Reaſon) *He receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are Fooliſhneſs to him:* He will not allow that to be divinely revealed, which is above meer natural Reaſon. He conſiders only the Difficulty in the Doctrine it ſelf, how it can be true; not what Reaſon he hath to believe ſuch a Revelation to be from God: And ſo he cannot know them, becauſe they are to be *ſpiritually diſcerned*; that is to be judged of, by the Revelation and Teſtimony of the Holy Spirit; and not by the meer Light of Reaſon: They are to be received upon the Account of a *Divine Revelation.*

THE the whole Tenor of the Apoſtles Diſcourſe ſeems to obviate, or anſwer this Objection of the Doctrines of the Goſpel being *Incredible* and *Unintelligible.* And if we apply it to the Doctrine of the *Trinity* and the *Incarnation of Chriſt*, it will hold good, notwithſtanding the Difficulty, *how Three can be one*, or how our *Bleſſed Saviour can be God and Man.* That there is one Divine Nature or Eſſence, common unto Three Perſons, united in Eſſential

tial Attributes, and yet distinguish'd from each other, in order and manner of Subsistance, and by peculiar Idioms and Relations. These Notions may puzzle our Reason to conceive, but should not stagger our Faith to believe, as Reveal'd in the Holy Scripture.

Considering *what God is*, and *what We are*, 'tis unreasonable to reject any Article of Faith, because we cannot fully conceive the Nature, and Manner of its being True. Shall we compare our Darkness with his Incomprehensible Light? Or equal our Understanding with his? Shall we refuse to believe what he hath declar'd for Truth, unless we can reconcile it with our Maxims? What room is there left for *Faith*, at this rate? What Credit is given to Divine Testimony, if we believe nothing to be True in Gods Word, except we can Fathom it, and would otherwise believe, without his Testimony?

IF we consider the Imperfections of our Understandings, both as to the Finite Nature of the Soul, and the Manifold Experience we have of it every Day, we must be content to be Ignorant of many Things. What is well known in many Civilized Countries, (as some have observed to illustrate this) may appear very strange to a great Part of the Heathen World. The Fabrick of a Watch; or the mutual Communication of Thoughts by Writing, would it may be, be as unconceivable to a Barbarous *Indian*, as the Mistery of the Tri-

nity is to us; yet the Truth of the Thing doth not depend upon his Conception of it.

AND how short do the wisest and most knowing Men come of the infinite Knowledge of God? Tho' we are certain of the Truth of his Being; how little do we know of his Nature and Perfections? How far above our Apprehensions is the *Divine Eternity*; How all Successions of Time are ever present to him and subject to his View; His *self Existence, Immensity, Omnipresence and Prescience* of the most contingent Events, *&c.* How far above us!

AND since we have not a perfect Knowledge of the Subject; we must hearken to what GOD himself saith of his own Nature, who knows it best. And we ought in Reason to enquire, whether the Doctrine of the *Holy Trinity* be contained in that Revelation which we receive, and can prove to be *Divine*; if we find it there, let the Doctrine be never so Incredible and Unintelligible, GOD is so far above us, and *his Ways and Thoughts above ours*, that we ought not to reject it upon that Account. *As the Heavens are higher than the Earth*, His Wisdom is as the *Heavens*, the highest and top of all Wisdom; Man's as the *Earth*, beneath which there is no Degree, but that of Hell and Darkness, so that the Things are two Great and Sublime for us to determine about.

WERE this duly consider'd we should find, that we cannot have so much Evidence of a Doctrine's being *False*, because 'tis *Inconceivable*;

conceivable; as there is Evidence of its being *True*, by being contain'd in Scripture Revelation. As to the Truth of things concerning Infinite Nature, we may judge by our Reason: But where the Object is Infinite, 'tis no Argument against the Truth of a Thing, that we cannot comprehend it, unless a Contradiction be proved, which there is none here.

IT hath often been proved that God might justly require of us in general, the Belief of what we cannot comprehend; and that they who reject the Mysteries of Christianity, run into greater Difficulties than those, who assert them. What is Incomprehensible as to the Manner, may be a necessary Article of Faith, as far as it is Reveal'd. * We don't assert *Three Gods*; and yet but *One God*, *Three Persons*: and yet but *One Person*: That would be contradictory: but the Scripture saith, that these Three, *Father*, *Word*, and *Spirit*, are *One God*: And we ought to distinguish between Numbers, and the Nature of Things. For *Three* to be *One*, is a Contradiction in Numbers; but whether an infinite Nature can communicate it self to three different Subsistances, without such a Division as is among created Beings, must not be determined by bare Number, but by the absolute Perfections of the Divine Nature: Which must be owned to be above our Comprehension.

* See Bishop of *Worcester*'s Sermon, on 1 *Tim.* I. 15. Vol. III. *Octave*, and *Orig. Sac.* Book II. Chap. VIII. §. 6, 7.

Therefore for any to assert, that there cannot be a Plurality of Persons; without a Plurality of Natures; or that there cannot be a Communication of Nature, without an Indentity of Persons; is to pretend to know more of the Infinite Nature of God, then any modest Man ought to pretend to.

'TIS certain the Objections from *the Unconceivableness* of this Doctrine are not so great, as the Evidence we have, that such a Doctrine is contained in the Holy Scriptures; and that that this Scripture is of God.

And let me add, that to pay Adoration and Divine Worship to *Christ*, (as the Christian Church hath done in all Ages), and to Trust in him for Pardon and Eternal Life, and yet believe him to be only *a Man*, destroys all the Reasons and Arguments of giving Divine Worship to *God only*: For to do this, and not own him to be *Omnipresent*, *Omniscient*, and *Almighty*, not own him to be the *True*, and *Eternal God*, is a greater Absurdity and Contradiction, then all that can be objected against the Doctrine of the Sacred Trinity. While they pay him Divine Honour, they must needs consider him as the GOD (whom all the Angels worship), and yet at the same time they deny him to be so: And that, because they cannot conceive, how *Father*, *Son*, and *Spirit* should be *One God*. But let us remember what GOD is, and what we are; and how *his Ways and Thoughts are above ours*. Let *no Man therfore deceive*

deceive himself. If any Man among you seem to be Wise in this World, let him be a Fool that he may be Wise; for the Things of God knoweth no Man, but the Spirit of God who revealeth them unto us.

Secondly, GOD's Ways are above ours, *in the Dispensations of his Providence:* 'Twere easy to show this, in a Multitude of Particulars. In his sparing and forbearing us: In restraining and preventing us: In keeping and preserving us, and disappointing our Enemies: Overruling our Affairs, directing our Conditions, and governing all that befalls us, Good or Evil, Accidental or Premeditated, and turning all to Wise and gracious Purposes, beyond our Thoughts.

With what perfect Wisdom is every Thing managed in the Goverment of this World? That even the Wickedness of Men is made to serve the purposes of his Glory? How wonderfully hath God Honour'd his Mercy, and Power, Holiness, Justice and Truth, in redeeming and saving Sinners by Jesus Christ, with greater Advantage, then if our first Parents had continued Innocent.

HIS *Ways are not as Ours*, but above them, in governing the Minds of Men, turning their Hearts, influencing their Counsels, and changing their Thoughts, to bring about and fulfil his Own. *His Ways are above ours*, in making Use of very unlikely Instruments, weak Means, yea such as in Appearance are Contrary, to effect his own Purposes in the Government of

of Nations, of particular Families, and Persons.

AND the Ways of his Providence on lets above ours. In his disposing Crosses and Afflictions, Temptations and Hardships unto those he loves best, and permitting others to live in Peace and Quiet.

HIS *Ways are not as ours, but above them*, in that the very Falls and Faults, Crimes and Follies of good Men are overul'd for much Good; and great Transgressions before Conversion, made serviceable to excellent Purposes afterward: What was Poyson in Nature, becomes Medicinal by Divine Grace. He that stumbles in the way, gets ground by it, if it help him to mend his Pace, to walk faster, and more warily. "How many can say, if it had "not been for such and such Falls, I had ne"ver known so much of my own Weakness, "and Frailty; I had never had such Experi"ence of Temptation, and how unable of "my self to resist it; I should never have "had so hearty a Detestation of Sin; such a "Tenderness of Conscience, such an Awe of "offending God, so fervent a Zeal to please "him, so sweet a Sense of his Mercy, so "Thankful an Acknowledgment of his Grace "in delivering and recovering me."

The very Remainders of Corruption in the Hearts of Men, which they bewail, and pray, and strive against, shall serve to convince them of their necessary Dependance on Gods Grace, shall cause them to walk humbly with

God

God; shall make them more circumspect and watchful against Temptation; and raise their Esteem, and Value of the Blood of Christ, and his constant Intercession in Heaven. God hereby assists us to keep Conscience tender, excites our Diligence after further Degrees of Mortification, quickens us to press on, by growth in Grace, toward Perfection, *&c.*

Moreover, HIS *Ways are above Ours* in the Conversion of Sinners, as to *the Subjects* he makes choice of, as to *the Season* and *Time* of their Change; as to *the Means* and *Method*, by which it is Accomplish'd and brought about. The Wind blows were it lists, and the Holy Spirit (by the Ministry oftentimes of weaker Ministers) works powerfully and savingly in whom he will, both to will, and do, of his own good Pleasure. One is awaken'd, convinced, prick'd at the Heart by a Sermon. Another in the same Seat, under the same Sermon, feels nothing. Sometimes by a soft still Voice; at other times by Thunder. Sometimes the most Unlikely are taken, and effectually called, when others are left: And this after many years delay and discouragement, and no hopeful Prospects, but the Contrary. Some out of wicked Families converted; others after strict and religious Education, become and continue most Vile and Profligate. What different Success hath the Gospel in some Places? At some Times, and to some Persons? And at different Times in the same Place? Tho' the same Mes-

sages

sage and the same Preacher? Sometimes on the weaker and more ignorant Sort, and sometimes on the more Learned; sometimes on elder Persons, and often on Younger: Who have discover'd much of the Grace of God betimes, with less Advantage of Education than others. And at *the last Hour*, some Malefactors, under a Sentence of Death, 'tis hop'd, have been truly Penitent, and Accepted, as well as the Thief on the Cross. Some by their own Afflictions, some by the warning of other Men's Examples, and by other Means, as well as by the plain Preaching of the Word, the ordinary Means.

HIS *Ways also are above Ours*, in the Punishment of Men in this Life: In making some Examples which were *not greater Sinners then others*, as our Lord hath expressly told us, *Luke* XIII. He would not spare *Job*'s *Ten Children* upon the Intercession and Prayer of their Righteous Father, tho' we don't read that they were wicked; when he would have spared many Thousands, that were wicked, in *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, and the Cities of the Plain, if there had been but *Ten Righteous Persons* among them.

HIS *Ways are above Ours*, in bringing Good out of the Evil of Punishment, and using wicked Instruments to accomplish other Ends and Purposes, than they design'd. The like might be said of Gods Ways in saving and delivering his People in extraordinary Dangers: Tarrying till their Enemies are at the very height

height of their Wickedneſs; and when there is leaſt Proſpect, or Appearance which way Deliverance ſhould come, then to interpoſe by ſeaſonable Salvation.

APPLICATION.

USE, I.

NO wonder then if we ſo often miſtake in our Thoughts, and Conceptions of the Ways and Works of God. If they are ſo much above ours, as Heaven is high above the Earth, if they are unſearchable, and beyond our reach, that we can ſee but a little Part of his Ways, do not underſtand the Connection and Dependance of one Part with the other, or the Deſign of the whole. *His Way is in the Whirlwind, the Clouds are the Duſt of his Feet, and his Footſteps are not known: He hideth himſelf that we cannot ſee him. Job* XXXIII. 7, 8, 9. *Nah.* I. 3.

AS to his Ways of *Grace* and *Mercy*, I have largely ſhown in the foregoing Sermons, That he is more Gracious then we believe: He is able to do, he doth, and will do more then we are able to ask or think, *Eph.* III. 20. We think (it may be) he will never receive us after ſuch and ſuch Tranſgreſſions, and yet he doth. We thought he would never Pardon us, and yet he hath forgiven: We ſaid in our Deſpair, that he is gone, and will never

Return;

Return; and yet the Light breaks out again, and we have found it to our Comfort.

Secondly, ARE his Ways so much above Ours, *what Reason have we to Reverence and Adore God in all his Ways and Works.* Believing his Wisdom, Goodness and Truth, we glorify God: By crediting his Word, trusting his Practice, and following his Counsel, and submitting to his Providence: Tho' the Doctrine be very misterious, the Providence very dark, the Duty very Difficult, and what is promised a great way off, and to Sence unlikely.

The more we contemplate the Wonders of his Providence and Grace, the higher Veneration shall we have for Him; and Abase our Selves before his Glorious Majesty; if we speak of Strength, he is Strong; if of Goodness, he is Love; if of Wisdom, he is Wise, *the only Wise God.*

'Tis unreasonable then to object against this Providence, because we cannot comprehend the Wisdom and Justice of every Event: We may object our Selves into Atheism, and Infidelity, if we will not adore his unsearchable Wisdom in the Goverment of the World. *His Judgments are a great Deep, Psal.* XXXVI. 6. 'Tis in vain for us to pretend to go to the Bottom of them, when he himself hath declared that they are *Unsearchable.* We should rather admire *God*; and confess our own Ignorance when the great Apostle himself declares, that *Gods Ways are past our finding out. Rom.* XI. 33.

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WVe may be certain that all he doth is agreeable to infinite VVisdom and Righteousness. As long as we own him to be God, we are sure he will do nothing Repugnant to those Perfections.

BESIDES he hath appointed a Day, wherein he will satisfy all the VVorld by the Revelation of his Righteous Judgment. In the mean time, *He doth great Things past our finding out; and wonderful Things without Number.* XI. *Job.* 10. There are Depths and Misteries in Divine Providence, that we must acknowledg to be Unsearchable: Let us not then Censure what we cannot Understand, what we cannot Fathom. Is it strange, that incomprehensible VVisdom should do incomprehensible Things? VVe should not therfore enquire too curiously into the Secrets of his Providence, nor determine any thing, * Rashly concerningit, which is not revealed to us.

VVE are well assur'd, that he made the VVorld; and yet there are many Questions about the VVorks of *Creation*, that may puzzle the wisest and most diligent Enquirer. So in *the Government of the World*, there are many things above our reach, and yet we may be assured an unerring VVisdom governs all. VVe are so Ignorant and short Sighted; and the Designs of God are so far beyond us, and the Means he useth are oftentimes so Various,

* See Dr. *J. Barrow*, of the Unsearchableness of God's Judgments. *Rom.* XI. 33. Vol. III. Serm 23.

and

and their Connection with his Deſign ſo much concealed from our weak Eyes, that no wonder if we are often at a loſs; eſpecially when all the Particulars of his VVorks of Providence, that make up the Beauty of the whole, are wonderfully interwoven together (one Paſſage and one Action having a certain Reference to a Million of others, yea unto all others, from firſt to laſt) ſo that it is not ſtrange, if we comprehend not the Reaſons of all Events; and diſcern not the Wiſdom and Righteouſneſs of God, as to many Particulars, while yet we believe him to be Wiſe, and Holy in all his Ways, and Righteous in all his Works.

HEREAFTER, when he hath finiſh'd his whole Deſign, from the Beginning to the End, (whereof we *now* ſee but a ſmall Part), the Difficulties that perplex and ſhock us for the preſent, will be all ſolv'd. VVhat is now cover'd with Darkneſs ſhall appear in open Light: And what is now a Riddle, will ceaſe to be ſo: For all the Changes and Revolutions of the VVorld, Publick and Private, as to Nations, Families and Perſons, will all be found, to have been directed in the wiſeſt and beſt Manner; and to have been *one compleat and orderly Means*, to bring about his VViſe and Holy Counſel for his own Glory.

LET us therefore adore him, conſidering that *his Ways are above Ours*, for if we do not *now*, ſee a Reaſon for the Truth of all that God ſpeaks,

ſpeaks, or the Wiſdom of all that he doth, we may yet be aſſur'd, that GOD is *True*, and *Wiſe*, and *Good*. And we ought to lay our hands on our Mouths, and Acquieſce, for this very Reaſon, becauſe his Ways are ſo much *above ours*.

Thirdly, WHAT Reaſon *then* have we, to put our Truſt and Confidence in God? To believe what he promiſeth, and leave it to him, to fulfil his Word in his own Time and Way? His Ways are ſo muth above Ours, that when we think him *furtheſt* off, he may be *neareſt* the doing that for us, which we deſire. If God ſhould not chuſe our Condition for us, we ſhould eaſily be undone by our own Choice. But we may and ought to truſt Him, who knoweth what is always, and upon all Accounts, *Beſt for us*. VVhereas there is no Man of the cleareſt Foreſight, and of the greateſt Warineſs, but may eaſily be deceived and Miſtaken, as to what is good for him in this Life. VVe find this was the Reſult of the Wiſe Man's Thoughts, concerning the Affairs of this World. *Eccleſ.* VI. 11, 12. *Seeing there be many Things that increaſe Vanity, what is Man the better? For who knoweth what is Good for Man in this Life; all the Days of his vain Life, which he ſpendeth as a Shadow? for who can tell a Man, what ſhall be after him, under the Sun.*

WE often desire and chuse such a Temporal Good, as proper to serve and promote some Particular Interest and Design, but cannot tell, whether it will be Prejudicial to our *main* and *greatest Interest*: If it would be so, 'tis a kindness to be disappointed. Besides we are too apt to consider our selves, as *Single* and *Alone*, in a private Capacity: God only knows what is best for us, as we are Parts of the whole Community, Members of the Universe, and stand related to other Men: It may be, we would desire to have, and be, and do *that*, which is more for the publick Good, should be enjoy'd by *Others*, and done by *Others*. Such a Condition of Life, such a Place of Imployment, such a Station of Service, we reckon to be very desirable for *Us*; when perhaps God knows, that *We* shall do more good in *another*; and that some Other will be more useful, and more a publick Blessing in *that Post*. Accordingly we should leave it to his Providence, who appoints us our Work, to Assign us our Station, and Opportunity for it.

AND here 'tis most certain, *our Spiritual* and *Eternal Good* is greatly concern'd. It may be, what we wish for, as a Desireable, temporal Blessing, would be to our Prejudice and Disadvantage, as to the Welfare of *our Souls*. How many, on this Account, have seen Reason to be thankful for Afflictive Disappiontments, as to many things they endeavour'd, and desir'd, but

God

God order'd it otherwise, for their best Good. *No Affliction for the present is Joyous, but Grievous, but afterwards it produceth the peaceable Fruits of Righteousness.* Heb. XII. 11. Uninterrupted Health and Peace, Plenty, Reputation, Joy and Comfort in Relations, may be deny'd us in Faithfulness and Kindness: For God only knows, whether it would not interfere with our *Spiritual Good*?

'TIS an obvious, and daily Instance as to *Riches*, and the Increase of an *Estate*: Many a poor Man (or suppose one in a middle Condition,) He fancies, if he had a great Estate, what a great Deal of Good he would do: With what a large Heart, he would supply the Necessities of the Poor; How many generous and charitable Things he would undertake: He would fain Help and Relieve the Poor (he tells you if he could,) and therfore his Desire of Riches, and Diligence in seeking for them, is but that he may do Good: But when *this Man* succeeds, how Common is it, that his Heart and Purposes are chang'd with his Condition? Or his Desire, and Love of Mony, grows with his Estate; so that He is as unable to do the Good he desires to do, as before. The Poor is unreliev'd, and he thinks himself, as far from an Ability to Relieve them *now*; as when he had but *half* of that, which now he hath. Besides that he is tempted to forget God, in other Instances; and falls into Luxury and Vanity, Intemperance, and

Pride; and Consequently, it had been better for him, to have continu'd in a Lower Station. He is really a Loser by his Gain of Riches, and 'tis well, if He be not finally and for ever lost.

IT is therfore our *Wisdom*, as well as *Duty*, for us to leave all Events to GOD, whose Ways are so far above ours. If we Reflect upon our own Ignorance, as to what shall be on the Morrow: How easily may to Morrows Event, unravel our Scheme of Thoughts, and frustrate the most probable Designs that can be laid? And how Ignorant are we, of what the Train of Consequences may be, upon what we Design. Unless we know, what will follow upon it, we cannot tell whether it will prove a Mischief, or a Blessing. *You thought Evil against me*, says *Joseph* to his Brethren, when they sold him into *Egypt*, *but God meant it for Good, to bring it to pass (as at this Day) to save much People alive*, Gen. L. 20.

MANY have lamented with Impatience, that they came too late to such a Port, to Sail with such a Convoy, or to Imbark in such a Ship; and yet within a little while, have bless't God for the Disappointment; having heard that the Ship was cast away, or taken by an Enemy; and all the Passengers drown'd or made Prisoners. Whereas GOD knows all the Consequences of Things; having all Causes and Effects in View; and all the Links of the Chain in his own Hand; and therfore

can

can never be Miſtaken in *what is Beſt*. Let us therefore truſt him, to diſpoſe of Us and ours, according to his own good Pleaſure.

Fourthly, HOVV Reprovable then is it, to Limit and Preſcribe to God, or to Cenſure, him concerning his VVays and VVorks, which are ſo much above us? He is not bound to give us an Account of all his Matters, or to utter all his VVords, for the Satisfaction of our curious and proud Enquiries. VVe are not to direct him what to do, as if we would teach him Knowledge: As if he had not done every thing for the beſt, in what befalls us, or Others. *Shall he that contends with the Almighty inſtruct him? He that reproveth GOD let him anſwer it.* Job XL. 2. with this *Elihu* ſilenc'd *Job*, XXXIII. 12. 13. *Behold in this thou art not Juſt, I will anſwer thee. God is greater then Man.* That is, *His ways are above ours.* Let us take heed of Cenſuring his Infinite and Eternal Wiſdom. For we are but of yeſter day, and know nothing. We cannot ſearch his ſecret Counſells. *Job* XI. 6. *It is as high as Heaven, what canſt thou do? Deeper then Hell, what canſt thou know?* His kind Deſigns, or faithful Gracious Purpoſes, may be concealed from us; as our Lord told *Peter*, *Joh.* XIII. 7. *What I do, thou knoweſt not now; but thou ſhalt know hereafter.*

Fifthly, LABOUR to ſubmit to God in all his Ways, without Murmuring, or Repining. 'Tis both our *Duty*, and *Intereſt* to do this, from what hath been diſcours'd, The Mind of God revealed in *his Word*; and the Will of God declar'd in *Providence*, muſt both be ſubmitted to, whatever Objections we may have concerning *Either*. As to *the latter*, we know not what is fitteſt to deſire, or chuſe for our Selves, or Others. We often ask *that*, which God knows would be Hurtful; and are Diſatisfied with *that*, which he intends for our Good. We would chuſe *that*, which it may be, would be Injurious to God, to our Selves; and to the World: And as often Repine at *that*, as a Calamity, which God intends us, as a Benefit; and afterwards proves ſo. Let us not then complain of his Government, or repine at his Providence. Let us not preſume to demand a Reaſon, why ſuch a Croſs befalls us; or why we are depriv'd of ſuch a Comfort: Let us not dare Arraign his Wiſdom, and Soveraignty at our Bar; but patiently ſubmit to him, and wait for him, *He is a God of Judgment; and his Thoughts and Ways are above ours.* Therfore.

Laſtly,

Laſtly, TAKE Comfort from this Conſideration. He may, and can turn all for Good, that we deprecate, or complain of as Evil. He may be bringing about *That*, which we have long pray'd for, by thoſe very Means, which have a quite contrary Appearance, for the preſent. He hath a thouſand Methods, that we can't conceive of, to effect his own Purpoſes; and he knows the fitteſt Time.

WHATEVER Difficulties we are under; Whatever Burdens we feel; Whatever Temptations we meet with; VVhatever Diſappointments we have had, or may have; VVhatever inward or outward Diſtreſſes, we may be exercis'd with; Still remember that *Gods Ways are far above ours.* Tho' he ſeem to neglect us, or to hide himſelf from us; tho' he ſeem to ſhut out our Prayers; and not regard our Cry; yet he knows what to do, and when to do it, and in the beſt Manner: And hath promiſed that *all things ſhall work for our Good*; and that *he will never leave us, nor forſake us.* Therfore Reſign your Selves to God, reſolving intirely to follow him; tho' like *Abraham*, you know not whither he will lead you. Reſolve you will ſubmit your Underſtandings and VVills to him, and believe whatever he declares to be True; and approve whatever he Appoints; and bear

whatsoever he imposeth; and undertake, and do, all that he requires; and patiently wait on the Lord, and keep his VVays, *who is a God of Judgment.* You have sufficient Encouragement to hope in his Mercy, and trust Him to fulfil his VVord, in his own Method, because *his Ways and Thoughts are not as Ours.*

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Books

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MR. *Poole's* Annotations, in Two Volumes.

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Mr. *Shower's* Winter Meditations, or a Sermon concerning Froſt, and Snow, and Winds, *&c.* and the Wonders of God therein.

——His Thankſgiving Sermon, *April* the 16. 1696.

Mr. *Nathaniel Vincents* Funeral Sermon, Preached by Mr. *N. Taylor*.

Mr. *Larimer's* Apology for the Miniſters, who Subſcribed only unto the ſtating of the Truths and Errors in Mr. *William's* Book, in Anſwer to Mr. *Trail's* Letter to a Miniſter in the Countrey.

——His Remarks on Mr. *Goodwin's* Diſcourſe of the Goſpel, proving that the Goſpel-Covenant is a Law of Grace, and Anſwering the Objections to the Contrary.

Mr. *Stephen's* Sermon before the Lord-Mayor, and Aldermen of *London*, at St. *Mary-Le-Bow*, *Jan.* 30. 1693.

——His Thankſgiving Sermon, *April* 16th. 1696.

Mr. *Slater's* Thankſgiving Sermon, *Octob.* 27. 1692.

——His Sermon at the Funeral of Mr. *John Reynolds*, and Mr. *Fincher*, Miniſters of the Goſpel.

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